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A Romance of the Prairie.

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AUTHOR OF THE "HUNTER'S FEAST," "SCALP HUNTERS," "RIFLE RANGERS," "QUADROON," AND "THE WHITE CHIEF."

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THE WAR-TRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

SOUVENIRS.

Land of the nopal and maguey—home of Moctezuma and Malinché!—I cannot wring thy memories from my heart! Years may roll on, hand wax weak, and heart grow old, but never till both are cold can I forget thee! I *would* not; for thee would I remember. Not for all the world would I bathe my soul in the waters of Lethe. Blessed be memory for thy sake!

Bright land of Anahuac! my spirit mounts upon the aërial wings of Fancy, and once more I stand upon thy shores! Over thy broad savannahs I spur my noble steed, whose joyous neigh tells that he too is inspired by the scene. I rest under the shade of the *corozo* palm, and quaff the wine of the *acrocomia*. I climb thy mountains of amygdaloid and porphyry—thy crags f quartz, that yield the white silver and the yellow gold. I ross the fields of lava, rugged in outline, and yet more rugged with their coverture of strange vegetable forms—the cycas and cactus, yuccas and zamias. I traverse thy table-plains through bristling rows of giant aloes, whose sparkling juice cheers me on my path. I stand upon the limits of eternal snow, crushing

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the Alpine lichen under my heel; while down in the deep barranca, far down below, I behold the feathery fronds of the palm, the wax-like foliage of the orange, the broad shining leaves of the pathos, the arums, and bananas! O that I could look with living eye on these bright pictures! But even palely outlined upon the retina of memory, they impart a soothing pleasure to my soul

Land of Moctezuma! I have other souvenirs of thee, more deeply graven on my memery than these pictures of peace. Thou recallest scenes of war. I traversed thy fields a foeman—sword in hand—and now, after years gone by, many a wild scene of soldier-life springs up before me with all the vividness of reality.

The Bivouac!—I sit by the night camp-fire; around are warlike forms and bearded faces. The blazing log reflects the sheen of arms and accoutrements—saddles, rifles, pistols, canteens, strewing the ground, or hanging from the branches of adjacent trees. Picketed steeds loom large in the darkness, their forms dimly outlined against the sombre background of the forest. A solitary palm stands near, its curving fronds looking hoary under the fire-light. The same light gleams upon the fluted columns of the great organ-cactus, upon agaves and bromelias, upon the silvery *tillandsia*, that drapes the tall trees as with a toga.

The wild tale is told—the song is sung—the jest goes round—the hoarse peal echoes through the aisles of the forest, frighting the parrot on its perch, and the wolf upon his prowl. Little reck they who sing, and jest, and laugh—little reck they of the morrow.

* * * * * * *

The Skirmish!—Morning breaks. The fragrant forest is silent, and the white blue light is just tinging the tree-tops. A shot rings upon the air: it is the warning-gun of the picket-sentinel, who comes galloping in upon the guard. The enemy

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approaches! "To horse!" the bugle thrills in clear loud notes The slumberers spring to their feet—they seize their rifles pistols, and sabres, and dash through the smouldering fires till ashes cloud the air. The steeds snort and neigh; in a trice they are saddled, bridled, and mounted; and away sweeps the troop along the forest road.

The enemy is in sight—a band of *guerillas*, in all their picturesqueness *manga* and *serapé*—of scarlet, purple, and gold. Lances, with shining points and streaming pennons, overtop the trees.

The bugle sounds the charge; its notes are drowned by the charging cheer. We meet our swarthy foemen face to face; spear-thrusts are answered by pistol-shots; our sabres cross and clink, but our snorting steeds rear back, and will not let us kill each other. We wheel and meet again, with deadlier aim, and more determined arm; we strike without remorse—we strike for freedom!

* * * * * * *

The Battle-field!—The serried columns and the bristling guns—the roar of cannon and the hoarse roll of drums—the bugle's wildest notes, the cheer, the charge—the struggle hand to hand—the falling foeman and his dying groan—the rout, retreat, the hoarse huzza for victory! I well remember, but I cannot paint them.

* * * * * * *

Land of Anahuac! thou recallest other scenes, far different from these—scenes of tender love or stormy passion. The strife is o'er—the war-drum has ceased to beat, and the bugle to bray; the steed stands chafing in his stall, and the conqueror dallies in the halls of the conquered. Love is now the victor, and the stern soldier, himself subdued, is transformed into a suing lover. In gilded hall or garden bower, behold him on bended knee, whispering his soft tale in the ear of some dark eyed *doncella*, Andalusian, or Aztec!

* * * * * * *

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Lovely land I have sweet memories of thee; for who could traverse thy fields without beholding some fair flower, ever after to be borne upon his bosom. And yet, not all my souvenirs are glad. Pleasant and painful, sweet and sad, they thrill my heart with alternate throes. But the sad emotions have been tempered by time, and the glad ones, at each returning tide, seem tinged with brighter glow. In thy bowers, as elsewhere, roses must be plucked from thorns; but in memory's mellowed light I see not the thorns—I behold only the bright and beautiful roses.

CHAPTER II.

A MEXICAN FRONTIER VILLAGE.

A MEXICAN *pueblita* on the banks of the Rio Bravo del Norte—a mere *rancheria* or hamlet. The quaint old church of Morisco-Italian style, with its cupola of motley japan, the residence of the *cura*, and the house of the *alcaldé*, are the only stone structures in the place. These constitute three sides of the plaza, a somewhat spacious square. The remaining side is taken up with shops or dwellings of the common people. They are built of large unburnt bricks (*adobés*), some of them washed with lime, others gradually colored like the proscenium of a theatre, but most of them uniform in their muddy and forbidding brown. All have heavy, jail-like doors, and windows without glass or sash. The *reja* of iron bars set vertically, opposes the burglar, not the weather.

From the four corners of the plaza, narrow, unpaved, dusty lanes lead off to the country, for some distance bordered on both sides by the adobé houses. Still further out, on the skirts of the village, and sparsely placed, are dwellings of frailer build

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but more picturesque appearance; they are *ridge-roofed* structures, of the split trunks of that gigantic lily, the arborescent yucca. Its branches form the rafters, its tough fibrous leaves the hatch. In these *ranchitos* dwell the poor peons, the descendants of the conquered race.

The stone dwellings, and those of mud likewise, are *flat-roofed*, tiled or cemented, sometimes tastefully japanned, with a parapet breast-high running round the edge. This flat roof is the *azotea*, characteristic of Mexican architecture.

When the sun is low and the evening cool, the azotea is a pleasant lounging-place, especially when the proprietor of the house has a taste for flowers; then it is converted into an aërial garden, and displays the rich flora, for which the picture-land of Mexico is justly celebrated. It is just the place to enjoy a cigar, a glass of *pinole*, or, if you prefer it, *catalan*. The smoke is wafted away, and the open air gives a relish to the beverage. Besides, your eye is feasted; you enjoy the privacy of a drawing-room, while you command what is passing in the street. The slight parapet gives security, while hindering a too free view from below; you see, without being seen. The world moves on, busied with earthly affairs, and does not think of looking up.

I stand upon such an azotea: it is that over the house of the alcaldé; and his being the tallest roof in the village, I command a view of all the others. I can see beyond them all, and note the prominent features of the surrounding country. My eye wanders with delight over the deep rich verdure of its tropic vegetation; I can even distinguish its more characteristic forms —the cactus, the yucca, and the agave. I observe that the village is girdled by a belt of open ground—cultivated fields—where the maize waves its silken tassels in the breeze, contrasting with the darker leaves of the capsicums and bean-plants (frijoles). This open ground is of limited extent. The *chappa-ral*, with its thorny thicket of acacias, mimosæ, ingas, and robi

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nias—a perfect maze of leguminous trees—hems it in; and so near is the verge of this jungle, that I can distinguish its undergrowth of stemless *sabal* palms and bromelias—the sun-scorched and scarlet leaves of the *pita* plant shining in the distance like lists of fire.

This propinquity of forest to the little pueblita bespeaks the indolence of the inhabitants; perhaps not. It must be remembered that these people are not agriculturists, but *vaqueros* (herdsmen); and that the glades and openings of that thick chapparal are speckled with herds of fierce Spanish cattle, and droves of small sharp-eared Andalusian horses, of the race of the Barb. The fact of so little cultivation does not abnegate the existence of industry on the part of the villagers. Grazing is their occupation, not farming; only a little of the latter to give them maize for their *tortillas*, chilé to season it with, and black beans to complete the repast. These three, with the half-wild beef of their wide pastures, constitute the staple of food throughout all Mexico. For drink, the denizen of the high table-land finds his favorite beverage—the rival of champagne—in the core of the gigantic aloe; while he of the tropic coast-land refreshes himself from the stem of another native endogen, the acrocomia palm.

Favored land! Ceres loves thee, and Bacchus too. To thy fields both the god and the goddess have been freely bounteous. Food and drink may be had from them on easy terms. Alas! as in all other lands—one only excepted—Nature's divine views have been thwarted, her aim set aside, by the malignity of man. As over the broad world, the blight of the despot is upon thy beauty.

Why are these people crowded together—hived, as it were, in towns and villages? Herdsmen, one would expect to find scattered by reason of their occupation. Besides, a sky continually bright, a genial clime, a picturesqueness of scene—all seem to invite to rural life; and yet I have ridden for hours, a

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succession of lovely landscapes rising before my eyes, all of them wild, wanting in that one feature which makes the rural picture perfect—the house, the dwelling of man! Towns there are, and at long intervals the huge *hacienda* of the landed lord, walled in like a fortress; but where are the *ranchos*, the homes of the common people? True, I have noticed the ruins of many, and that explains the puzzle. I remember, now that I am on the *frontier*, that for years past the banks of the Rio Bravo, from its source to the sea, have been hostile ground—a war-border 1500 miles in length! Many a red conflict has occurred—is still occurring—between those Arabs of the American desert—the *Horse* Indians—and the pale-faced descendants of the Spaniard. That is why the ranchos exist only in ruins—that is why the haciendas are loopholed, and the populace pent up within walls. The condition of feudal Europe exists in free America, on the banks of the Rio Bravo del Norté!

* * * * * * *

Nearly a mile off, looking westward, I perceive the sheen of water: it is a reach of the great river that glances under the setting sun. The river curves at that point; and the summit of a gentle hill, half girdled by the stream, is crowned by the low white walls of a hacienda. Though only one story high, this hacienda appears, from its extent, and the style of its architecture, to be a noble mansion. Like all of its class, it is flat-roofed; but the parapet is crenated, and small ornamental turrets over the angles and the great gateway relieve the monotony of its outlines. A larger tower, the belfry, appears in the background, for the Mexican hacienda is usually provided with its little *capilla* for the convenient worship of the peon retainers. The emblems of religion, such as it is, are thick over the land. The glimmer of glass behind the iron rejas relieves to some extent the prison-like aspect, so characteristic of Mexican country-houses. This is further modified by the appearance over the parapet of green foliage Forms of tropic vegetation

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show above the wall; among others, the graceful curving fronds of a palm. This must be an exotic, for although the lower half of the Rio Bravo is within the zone of the palms, the species that grow so far north are fan-palms (*chamærops* and *sabal*). This one is of far different form, with plume-shaped pinnate fronds, of the character of *cocos*, *phœnix* or *euterpe*. I note the fact, not from any botanical curiosity with which it inspires me, but rather because the presence of this exotic palm has a significance. It illustrates a point in the character of him—it may be *her*—who is the presiding spirit of the place. No doubt there is a fair garden upon the azotea—perhaps a fair being among its flowers. Pleasant thoughts spring up—anticipations. I long to climb that sloping hill, to enter that splendid mansion, and longing still, I gaze.

* * * * * * *

The ring of a bugle reminds me of my duties. 'Tis but a stable-call; but it has driven those sweet reflections out of my mind, and my eyes are turned away from the bright mansion, and rest upon the plaza of the pueblita. There, a far different scene greets their glance.

CHAPTER III.

THE RANGERS ON PICKET.

The centre of the plaza presents a salient point in the picture. There the well (*el poso*), with its gigantic wheel, its huge leathern belt and buckets, its trough of cemented stone-work, offers an oriental aspect. Verily, it is the Persian wheel! 'Tis odd to a northern eye, particularly, to find such a structure in this western land; but the explanation is easy. That idea has travelled from Egypt along the southern shores of the Mediterranean. With the Moors it crossed the Straits of Gibraltar,

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and the Spaniard has carried it over the Atlantic. The reader of the sacred volume will find many a familiar passage illustrated in the customs of Mexico. The genius of the Arab has shaped many a thought for the brain of the Aztec.

My eye rests not long upon the Persian wheel, but turns to gaze on the scene of active life that is passing around it. Forms, and varied ones, I trow, are moving there.

Gliding with silent step and dubious look—his wide *calzoneros* flapping around his ankles, his arms and shoulders shrouded in the mottled serapé, his black broad-brimmed hat darkening still more his swarth face—goes the *poblano*, the denizen of the adobé hut. He shuns the centre of the plaza, keeping around the walls; but at intervals his eyes are turned towards the well with a look of mingled fierceness and fear. He reaches a doorway—it is silently opened by a hand within—he enters quickly, and seems glad to get out of sight. A little after, I can catch a glimpse of his sombre face dimly outlined behind the bars of the reja. At distant corners, I descry small groups of his class—all similarly costumed in calzoneros, striped blankets, and glaze hats; all, like him, wearing uneasy looks. They gesticulate little, contrary to their usual habit, and converse only in whispers or low mutterings. Unusual circumstances surround them.

Most of the women are within doors; a few of the poorer class—of pure Indian race—are seated in the plaza. They are hucksters, and their wares are spread before them on a thin palm-leaf mat (*petaté*), while another similar one, supported umbrella-like on a stem, screens them and their merchandise from the sun Their dyed woollen garments, their bare heads, their coarse black hair, adorned with twists of scarlet worsted, give them somewhat of a gipsy look. They appear as free of care as the zingali themselves: they laugh, and chatter, and show their white teeth all day long, asking each new-comer to purchase their fruits and vegetables, their *piñolé*, *atolé*, and *agua dulce*. Their not unmusical voices ring pleasantly upon the ear.

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Now and then a young girl, with red *olla* poised upon her crown, trips lightly across the plaza in the direction of the well. Perhaps she is a *poblana*, one of the belles of the village, in short-skirted, bright-coloured petticoat, embroidered but sleeveless chemisette, with small satin slippers upon her feet; head, shoulders, and bosom shrouded in the blue-gray *reboso*; arms and ankles bare. Several of these are seen passing to and fro. They appear less uneasy than the men; they even smile at intervals, and reply to the rude badinage uttered in an unknown tongue by the odd-looking strangers around the well. The Mexican women are courageous as they are amiable. As a race, their beauty is undeniable.

But who are these strangers? They do not belong to the place, that is evident; and equally clear it is that they are objects of terror to those who do. At present, they are masters here. Their numbers, their proud confident swagger, and the bold loud tone of their conversation, attest that they are masters of the ground. Who are they? Odd-looking, I have styled them; and the phrase is to be taken in its full significance. A more odd-looking set of fellows never mustered in a Mexican plaza, nor elsewhere.

There are fourscore of them; and but that each carries a yäger rifle in his hand, a knife in his belt, and a Colt's pistol on his thigh, you could not discover the slightest point of resemblance between any two of them. Their arms are the only things about them denoting *uniformity*, and some sort of organization; for the rest, they are as unlike one another as the various shapes and hues of coarse broadcloth, woollen jeans, cottonades, colored blankets, and buckskin, can make them. They wear caps of coon-skin, and cat's-skin, and squirrel; hats of beaver, and felt, and glaze, of wool and palmetto, of every imaginable shape and slouch. Even of the modern monster—the silken "tile"—samples might be seen, *badly crushed*. There are coats of broadcloth, few in number, and well worn; but many are the garments

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of "Kentucky jeans," of bluish-grey, of copper-colored nigger cloth, and sky-colored cottonade. Some wear coats made of green blankets, others of blue ones, and some of a scarlet red There are hunting-shirts of dressed deerskin, with plaited skirt, and cape, fringed and jauntily adorned with beads and embroidery—the favorite style of the backwoods hunter; but others there are of true Indian cut, open only at the throat, and hanging loose, or fastened around the waist with a belt—the same that secures the knife and pistol. There are cloth jackets, too, such as are worn by sailors, and others of sky-blue cottonade—the costume of the Creole of Louisiana; some of red-brown leather—the *jaqueta* of the Spano-American; and still another fashion, the close-fitting embroidered "spencer" of the Mexican ranchero. Some shoulders are covered by serapés, and some by the more graceful and toga-like manga. Look lower down: examine the limbs of the men of this motley band: the covering of these is not less varied than their upper garments. You see wrappers of coarse cloth, of flannel, and of baize; they are blue, and scarlet, and green. You see leggings of rawhide and of buckskin; boots of horse-leather reaching to the thighs; "nigger boots" of still coarser fabric, with the pantaloons tucked under *brogans* of unstained calf-skin, and moccasins of varied cut, betokening the fashion of more than one Indian tribe. You may see limbs incased in calzoneros, and others in the heavy stamped leather *botas* of the Mexican horseman, resembling the greaves of warriors of the olden time.

The heels of all are armed, though their armature is as varied as the costumes. There are spurs of silver and of steel, some plated, and some with the plating worn off; some strapped, and others screwed into the heel of the boot; some light, with small rowels and tiny teeth, while others are seen (the heavy spur of Mexico) of several pounds' weight, with rowels five inches in diameter, and teeth that might be dashed through the ribs of a horse!—cruel weapons of the Mexican *cavallero*.

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But these spurs in the plaza, these botas and calzoneros, these mangas and serapés, are not worn by *Mexicans*. Their present wearers are men of a different race. Most of those tall stalwart bodies are the product of the maize-plant of Kentucky and Tennessee, or the buckwheat and "hog meat" of the fertile flats of Ohio, Indiana, and the Illinois. They are the squatters and hunters of the backwoods, the farmers of the great western slopes of the Alleghanies, the boatmen of the Mississippi, the pioneers of Arkansas and Missouri, the trappers of prairie-land, the *voyageurs* of the lake-country, the young planters of the lower states, the French Creoles of Louisiana, the adventurous settlers of Texas, with here and there a gay city spark from the larger towns of the "great West." Yes, and from other sources are individuals of that mixed band. I recognize the Teutonic type—the fair hair and whitish-yellow moustache of the German, the florid Englishman, the staid Scot, and his contrast the noisy Hibernian; both equally brave. I behold the adroit and nimble Frenchman, full of laugh and chatter, the stanch soldierly Swiss, and the moustached exile of Poland, dark, sombre, and silent. What a study for an ethnologist is that band of odd-looking men! Who are they?

You have thrice asked the question. I answer it: They are a corps of "*Rangers*"—a guerilla of the American army.

And who am I? Their captain—their chief.

Yes, I am the leader of that queer crew; and, despite their rough motley aspect, I dare affirm, that not in Europe, not in America elsewhere, not upon the great globe's surface, can be found a band, of like numbers, to equal them in strength, daring, and warlike intelligence. Many of them have spent half a life in the sharpening practice of border warfare—Indian or Mexican—and from these the others have learnt. Some have been gentlemen upon whom fortune has frowned; a few have been desperadoes within the pale of civilized life; and a smaller few

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perhaps, *outlaws* beyond it—bad materials wherewith to *colonize* not so bad, if you go but to *conquer*.

Rude as is the *coup d'œil* of the corps, I am proud to say that high sentiment of honor pervades it, higher than will be found in the picked *corps de garde* of an emperor. True, they appear rough and reckless—terrible, I might say; for most of them—with their long beards and hair, dust-begrimed faces, slouched hats, and odd habiliments, belted as they are with knife, pistol, powder-horn, and pouch—present such an aspect, that you would wrong them to take them as they look. Few among them are the pure bandits whose aim is plunder. Many a noble heart beats beneath a rude exterior—many a one truly humane. There are hearts in that band that throb under the influence of patriotism; some are guided by a still more nobler impulse, a desire to extend the area of freedom; others, it is true, yearn but for revenge. These last are chiefly Texans, who mourn a friend or brother slain by Mexican treachery. They have not forgotten the cowardly assassination of Goliad; they remember the red butchery of the Alamo.

Perhaps I alone, of all the band, have no motive for being here; if one, 'tis slight—scarce so noble as vengeance. Mere chance, the love of excitement and adventure, perhaps some weak fondness for power and fame, are all the excuses I can urge for taking a hand in this affair. A poor adventurer, without friends, without home, without country—for my native land is no more a nation—my heart is not cheered by a single throb of patriotism. I have no private wrong to redress, no public cause, no country for which to combat.

During intervals of inaction, these thoughts recur to me, and give me pain.

* * * * * *

The men have picketed their horses in the church enclosure; some are tied to trees, and others to the reja-bars of the windows: like their riders, a motley group, various in size, color,

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and race. The strong high-mettled steed of Kentucky and Tennessee, the light "pacer" of Louisiana, the cob, the barb, his descendant the "mustang," that but a few weeks ago was running wild upon the prairies, may all be seen in the troop. Mules, also, of two distinct races—the large gaunt mule of North America, and the smaller and more sprightly variety, native of the soil.

My own black steed, with his pretty fern-colored muzzle, stands near the fountain in the centre of the plaza. My eye wanders with a sort of habitual delight over the oval outlines of his body. How proudly he curves his swan-like neck, and with mock anger paws up the dust! He knows that my eyes are upon him.

* * * * * *

We have been scarcely an hour in the rancheria; we are perfect strangers to it: we are the first American troop its people have yet seen, although the war has been going on for some months further down the river. We have been sent here upon picket-duty, with orders to scour the surrounding country as far as it is safe. The object in sending us hither is not so much to guard against a surprise from our Mexican foe, who is not upon this side, but to guard *them*, the Mexicans, from another enemy—an enemy of *both of us*—the Comanche! These Indian Ishmaelites, report says, are upon the "*war-trail*," and have quite an army in the field. It is said they are foraging further up the river, where they have it all to themselves, and have just pillaged a settlement in that direction—butchered the men, as is their wont, and carried off the women, children, and chattels. We came hither to conquer the Mexicans, but we must *protect* while *conquering* them! *Cosas de Mexico!*

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CHAPTER IV.

MAKING A CAPTIVE.

I was musing upon the singular character of this *triangular* war, when my reverie was disturbed by the hoof-strokes of a horse. The sounds came from a distance, outside the village; the strokes were those of a horse at full gallop.

I stepped hastily across the azotea, and looked over the parapet, in hopes of obtaining a view of this rapid rider. I was not disappointed—the road and the rider came full under my eyes.

In the latter, I beheld a picturesque object. He appeared to be a very young man—a mere youth, without beard or moustache, but of singularly handsome features. The complexion was dark, almost brown; but even at the distance of two hundred yards, I could perceive the flash of a noble eye, and note a damask redness upon his cheeks. His shoulders were covered with a scarlet manga, that draped backward over the hips of his horse; and upon his head he wore a light sombrero, laced, banded, and tasselled with bullion of gold. The horse was a small, but finely proportioned mustang, spotted like a jaguar upon a ground color of cream—a true Andalusian.

The horseman was advancing at a gallop, without fear of the ground before him: by chance, his eyes were raised to the level of the azotea, on which I stood; my uniform, and the sparkle of my accoutrements, caught his glance; and quick as thought, as if by an involuntary movement, he reined up his mustang, until its ample tail lay clustered upon the dust of the road. It was then that I noted the singular appearance of both horse and rider.

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Just at that moment, the ranger, who held picket on that side of the village, sprang forth from his hiding-place, and challenged the horseman to halt. The challenge was unheeded. Another jerk of the rein spun the mustang round, as upon a pivot, and the next instant, impelled by the spur, the animal resumed his gallop. He did not return by the road, but shot off in a new direction, nearly at right angles to his former course. A rifle-bullet would have followed, and most likely have stopped the career of either horse or rider, had not I, just in the nick of time, shouted to the sentry to hold his fire.

A reflection had occurred to me: the game was too noble, too beautiful, to be butchered by a bullet; it was worth a chase and a capture.

My horse was by the water-trough. I had noticed that he was not yet unsaddled, and the bridle was still on. He had been warmed by the morning's scout; and I had ordered my negro groom to walk him round for an hour or so before letting him at the water.

I did not wait to descend by the *escalera;* I sprang upon the parapet, and from that into the plazza. The groom, perceiving my intention, met me half-way with the horse. I seized the reins, and bounded into the saddle. Several of the readiest of the rangers followed my example; and as I galloped down the lane that led out of the rancheria, I could tell by the clattering of hoofs that half a dozen of them were at my heels. I cared not much for that, for surely I was a match for the stripling we meant to chase. I knew, moreover, that speed at the moment was of more importance than strength; and that if the spotted horse possessed as much "bottom" as he evidently did "heels," his rider and I would have it to ourselves in the end. I knew that all the horses of my troop were less swift than my own; and from the half-dozen springs I had witnessed on the part of the mustang, I felt satisfied that it remained only for me to over haul him.

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My springing down from the roof and up into the saddle had occupied scarcely two minutes' time; and in two more, I had cleared the houses, and was scouring across the fields after the scarlet horseman. He was evidently making to get round the village, and continue the journey our presence had so suddenly interrupted.

The chase led through a field of *milpas* (maize). My horse sank deeply in the loose earth, while the lighter mustang bounded over it like a hare: he was distancing me. I began to fear I would lose him, when all at once I saw that his course was intercepted by a list of magueys, running transversely right and left. The plants were of luxuriant growth, eight or ten feet high, and placed alternately, so that their huge hooked blades interlocked with each other, forming a natural *chevaux-de-frise.*

This barrier at first glance seemed impassable for either man or horse. It brought the Mexican to a halt. He was turning to skirt it, when he perceived that I had leaned into the diagonal line, and could not fail to head him. With a quick wrench upon the rein, he once more wheeled round, set his horse against the magueys, plied the spur, and dashed right into their midst. In a moment more, both horse and rider were out of sight; but as I spurred up to the spot, I could hear the thick blades crackle under the hoofs of the mustang.

There was no time for reflection. I must either follow, or abandon the pursuit. The alternative was not thought of. I was on my honor, my steed upon his mettle; and without halt we went plunging through the magueys.

Torn and bleeding, we came out on the opposite side; and I perceived, to my satisfaction, that I had made better time than the red rider before me: his halt had lessened the distance between us. But another field of milpas had to be passed, and he was again gaining upon me, as we galloped over the heavy ground. When nearly through the field, I perceived something glancing before us: it was water—a wide drain or ditch, a *sequia*

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for irrigating the field. Like the magueys, it ran transversely to our course.

"That will stop him," thought I, "he must take to the right or left, and then ——"

My thoughts were interrupted. Instead of turning either to right or left, the Mexican headed his horse at the zequia, and the noble creature rushing forward, rose like a bird upon the wing, and cleared the canal!

I had no time to expend in admiring the feat; I hastened to imitate it, and galloping forward, I set myself for the leap. My brave steed needed neither whip nor spur; he had seen the other leap the zequia, and he knew what was expected of him. With a bound, he went over, clearing the drain by several feet; and then, as if resolved upon bringing the affair to an end, he laid his head forward, and stretched himself at race-course speed.

A broad grassy plain—a savannah—lay before us, and the hoofs of both horses, pursuer and pursued, now rang upon hard firm turf. The rest of the chase would have been a simple trial of speed, and I made sure of overhauling the mustang before he could reach the opposite side, when a new obstacle presented itself. A vast herd of cattle and horses studded the savannah throughout its whole extent; these, startled by our wild gallop, tossed their heads, and ran affrighted in every direction, but frequently as otherwise, directly in our way. More than once, I was forced to rein in, to save my neck or my horse's from being broken over a fierce bull or a long-horned lumbering ox; and more than once I was compelled to swerve from my course.

What vexed me most was, that in this zigzag race, the mustang, from practice, perhaps, had the advantage; and while it continued, he increased his distance. We cleared the drove at length; but to my chagrin I perceived that we were nearly across the plain. As I glanced ahead, I saw the chappara, near, with taller trees rising over it; beyond, I saw the swell of

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a hill, with white walls upon its summit. It was the hacienda already mentioned: we were riding directly for it.

I was growing anxious about the result. Should the horseman reach the thicket, I would be almost certain to lose him. I *dared not let him escape.* What would my men say, if I went back without him? I had hindered the sentry from firing, and permitted to escape, perhaps a spy, perhaps some important personage. His desperate efforts to get off favored the supposition that he was one or the other. *He must be taken!*

Under the impulse of fresh determination, I lanced the flanks of my horse more deeply than ever; he knew what was wanted, and stretched himself to his utmost. There were no more cattle, not an obstacle, and his superior speed soon lessened the distance between himself and the mustang. Ten seconds more would do it.

The ten seconds flew by. I *felt* myself within *shooting* distance; I drew my pistol from its holster.

"*Alto! o yo tiro*" (Halt! or I fire), I cried aloud. There was no reply: the mustang kept on! "Halt!" I cried again, unwilling to take the life of a fellow-creature—"halt! or you are a dead man!"

No reply again.

There were not six yards between myself and the Mexican Riding straight behind him, I could have sent a bullet into his back. Some secret instinct restrained me; it was partly, though not altogether, a feeling of admiration: there was an indefinable idea in my mind at the moment. My finger rested on the trigger, and I could not draw it.

"He must not escape! He is nearing the trees! He must not be allowed to enter the thicket; I shall cripple the horse."

I looked for a place to aim at; should I hit him in the hips, he might still get off. Where?

At this moment, the animal wheeled, as if guided by his own impulse—perhaps by the knees of his rider—and shot off in a

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new direction. The object of this manœuvre was to put space between us. So far it was successful; but it gave me just the opportunity to aim as I wanted; and levelling my pistol, I sent a bullet into the kidneys of the mustang. A single plunge forward was his last, and both horse and rider came to the ground.

In an instant the latter had disengaged himself from his struggling steed, and stood upon his feet. Fancying he might still attempt to escape to the thicket, I spurred forward, pistol in hand, and pointed the weapon at his head.

He had no intention either of further flight or resistance; but facing the levelled tube, and looking me full in the face, he said with an air of perfect coolness:

"*No matame, cavallero! Soy muger!*" (Do not kill me, sir! I am a woman!)

CHAPTER V.

MY CAPTIVE.

"*Do not kill me sir! I am a woman!*"

This declaration scarcely astonished me; I was half prepared for it. During our wild gallop, I had noticed one or two circumstances which led me to suspect that the spy I pursued was a female. As the mustang sprang over the zequia, the flowing skirt of the manga was puffed upward, and hung for some moments spread out in the air. A velvet bodice beneath, a tunic-like skirt, the *tournure* of the form, all impressed me as singular for a cavallero, however rich and young. The limbs I could not see, as the goat-skin *armas-de-agua* were drawn over them; but I caught a glimpse of a gold spur, and the heel of a tiny red boot to which it was attached. The clubbed hair too, loosened by the violent motion, sprang backward, and in

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two thick plaits, slightly dishevelled, rested upon the croup of the horse. A young Indian's might have done so, but *his* tresses would have been jet-black and coarse-grained, whereas those under my eyes were soft, silky, and nut-brown. Neither the style of riding—*à la Duchesse de Berri*—nor the manlike costume of manga and hat, hindred me from forming my conclusions. Both the style and costume are common to the *rancheras* of Mexico. Moreover, as the mustang made his last double, I had caught a near view of the side face of his rider. The features of no man—not the Trojan shepherd, not Adonis nor Endymion—were so exquisitely chiselled as they. Certainly a woman! Her declaration at once put an end to my conjectures, but, as I have said, did not astonish me.

I *was* astonished, however, by its tone and manner. Instead of being uttered in accents of alarm, it was pronounced as coolly as if the whole thing had been a jest! Sadness, not supplication, was the prevailing tone, which was further confirmed as she knelt to the ground, pressed her lips to the muzzle of the still breathing mustang, and exclaimed:

"*Ay-de mi! pobre yegua! muerte! muerte!*" (Alas me! poor mare! dead! dead!)

"A woman?" said I, feigning astonishment. My interrogatory was unheeded; she did not even look up.

"*Ay-de-mi! pobre yegua! Lola, Lolita!*" she repeated, as coolly as if the dead mustang was the only object of her thoughts, and I, the armed assassin, fifty miles from the spot!

"You say you are a woman?" I again asked—in my embarrassment scarcely knowing what to say.

"*Si, señor; nada mas—que quiere V.?*" (Yes, sir; nothing more—what do you want?) As she made this reply, she rose to her feet, and stood confronting me without the slightest semblance of fear. So unexpected was the answer, both in tone and sentiment, that for the life of me I could not help breaking into a laugh.

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"You are merry, sir. You have made *me* sad; you have killed my favorite!"

I shall not easily forget the look that accompanied these words—sorrow, anger, contempt, defiance, were expressed in one and the same glance. My laughter was suddenly checked; I felt humiliated in that proud presence.

"Señorita," I replied, "I deeply regret the necessity I have been under: it might have been worse?"——

"And how, pray?—how worse?" demanded she, interrupting me.

"My pistol might have been aimed at *yourself*, but for a suspicion"——

"*Carrambo!*" cried she, again interrupting me, "it could not have been worse! I loved that creature dearly—dearly as I do my life—*as I love my father—pobre yeguita—ita—ita!*"

And as she thus wildly expressed herself, she bent down, passed her arms around the neck of the mustang, and once more pressed her lips to its velvet cheek. Then gently closing its eyelids, she rose to an erect attitude, and stood with folded arms, regarding the lifeless form with a sad and bitter expression of countenance.

I scarcely knew what to say. I was in a dilemma with my fair captive. I would have given a month of my "pay-roll" to have restored the spotted mustang to life; but as that was out of the question, I bethought me of some means of making restitution to its owner. An offer of money would not be delicate. What then?

A thought occurred to me, that promised to relieve me from my embarrassment. The eagerness of the rich Mexicans to obtain our large American horses—*frisomes*, as they term them—was well known throughout the army. Fabulous prices were often paid for them by these *ricos*, who wanted them for display upon the *Paseo*. We had many good half-bred bloods in the troop; one of these, thought I, might be acceptable, even to a

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lady who had lost her pet. I made the offer as delicately as I could. It was rejected with scorn!

"What, señor!" cried she, striking the ground with her foot till the rowels rang—"what? A horse to me?—*Mira!*" she continued, pointing to the plain: "look there, sir! There are a thousand horses; they are mine. Now, know the value of your offer. Do I stand in need of a horse?"

"But Señorita," stammered I, apologizingly "these are horses of native race. The one I propose to"——

"Bah!" she exclaimed, interrupting me, and pointing to the mustang; "I would not have exchanged *that native* for all the trisones in your troop. Not one of them was its equal!"

A personal slight would not have called forth a contradiction; yet this defiance had that effect. She had touched the chord of my vanity—I might almost say, of my affection. With some pique I replied:

"*One*, señorita?"

I looked towards Moro as I spoke. Her eyes followed mine, and she stood for some moments gazing at him in silence. I watched the expression of her eye; I saw it kindle into admiration as it swept over the gracefully curving outlines of my noble steed. He looked at the moment superb; the short skurry had drawn the foam from his lips, and flakes of it clung against his neck and counter, contrasting finely with the shining black of his skin; his sides heaved and fell in regular undulations, and the smoke issued from his blood-red nostrils; his eye was still on fire, and his neck proudly arched, as though conscious of his late triumph, and the interest he was now exciting.

For a long while she stood gazing upon him, and though she spoke not a word, I saw that she recognised his fine points.

"You are right, cavallero," said she at length, thoughtfully; "he *is*."

Just then, a series of reflections were passing through my mind, that rendered me extremely uncomfortable: and I felt

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regret that I had so pointedly drawn her attention to the horse Would she demand *him*? That was the thought that troubled me. I had not promised her *any* horse in my troop, and More I would not have given for her herd of a thousand; but on the strength of the offer I had made, what if she should fancy *him*? The circumstances were awkward for a refusal; indeed, under any circumstances refusal would have been painful. I began to feel that I could deny nothing. This proud, beautiful woman already *divided my interest with Moro!*

My position was a delicate one; fortunately, I was relieved from it by an incident that carried our thoughts into a new current; the troopers who had followed me at that moment rode up.

She seemed uneasy at their presence; that could not be wondered at, considering their wild garb and fierce looks. I ordered them back to their quarters. They stared for a moment at the fallen mustang with its rich blood-stained trappings, at its late rider, and her picturesque garments; and then, muttering a few words to one another, obeyed the order. I was once more alone with my captive

CHAPTER VI.

ISOLINA DE VARGAS.

As soon as the men were out of hearing, she said interrogatively: "*Tejanos?*"

"Some of them are Texans—not all."

"You are their chief?"

"I am."

"Captain I presume?"

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"That is my rank."

"And now, Señor Captain, am I your captive?"

The question took me by surprise, and, for the moment, I did not know what answer to make. The excitement of the chase, the encounter, and its curious developments—perhaps, above all other things, the bewitching beauty of my captive—had driven out of my mind the whole purpose of the pursuit; and for some minutes I had not been thinking of any result. The interrogatory reminded me that I had a delicate duty to perform Was this lady a *spy*?

Such a supposition was by no means improbable, as any old campaigner can testify. "Fair ladies—though never one so fair as she—have, ere now, served their country in this fashion She may be the bearer of some important dispatch for the enemy. If so, and I permit her to go free, the consequences may be serious—unpleasant even to myself." Thus ran my reflections.

On the other hand, I disliked the duty of taking her back a prisoner. I feared to execute it; I dreaded *her* displeasure. *I wished to be friends with her*. I felt the influence of that mysterious power which transcends all strength—the power of beauty. I had been but ten minutes in the company of this brown-skinned maiden, and already she controlled my heart as though she had been its mistress for life!

I knew not how to reply. She saw that I hesitated, and again put the question:

"Am I your captive?"

"I fear, señorita, I am *yours*."

I was prompted to this declaration, partly to escape from a direct answer, and partly giving way to the passion already fast gathering in my bosom. It was no coquetry on my part, no desire to make a pretty passage of words. Though I spoke only from impulse, I was serious; and with no little anxiety did I watch the effect of my speech.

Her large lustrous eyes rested upon me, at first with a puzzled

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expression; this gradually changed to one of more significance —one that pleased me better. She seemed for a moment to throw aside her indifference, and regarded me with more attention. I fancied, from the glance she gave, that she was contented with what I had said. For all that, the slight curl upon her pretty lip had a provoking air of triumph in it; and she resumed her proud *hauteur* as she replied:

"Come, cavallero, this is idle compliment. Am I free to go?"

I wavered betwixt duty and over-politeness: a compromise offered itself.

"Lady," said I, approaching her, and looking as seriously as I could into her beautiful eyes, "if you give me your word that you are *not a spy*, you are free to go: your word—I ask nothing more."

I prescribed these conditions rather in a tone of entreaty than command. I affected sternness, but my countenance must have mocked me.

My captive broke into unrestrained laughter, crying out at intervals:

"I a spy!—a spy! Ha, ha, ha! Señor Capitan, you are jesting?"

"I hope, señorita, *you* are in earnest. You are no spy, then? —you bear no dispatch for our enemy?"

"Nothing of the sort, mio capitan;" and she continued her light laughter.

"Why, then, did you try to make away from us?"

"Ah, cavallero! are you not Tejanos? Do not be offended when I tell you that your people bear but an indifferent reputation among us Mexicans."

"But your attempt to escape was, to say the least, rash and imprudent; you risked life by it."

"*Carrambo*, yes! I perceive I did;" and she looked significantly at the mustang, while a bitter smile played upon her

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lips. "I perceive it now; I did not then. I did not think there was a horseman in all your troop could come up with me. *Merced!* there was *one*. *You* have overtaken me: *you alone* could have done it"

As she uttered these words, her large brown eyes were once more turned upon me—not in a fixed gaze, but wandering. She scanned me from the forage-cap on my crown to the spur upon my heel. I watched her eye with eager interest: I fancied that its scornful expression was giving way; I fancied there was a ray of tenderness in the glance. I would have given the world to have divined her thoughts at that moment.

Our eyes met, and parted in mutual embarrassment—at least I fancied so; for on turning again, I saw that her head drooped, and her gaze was directed downward, as if some new thought occupied her.

For some moments, both were silent. We might have remained longer thus, but it occurred to me that I was acting rudely. The lady was still my captive. I had not yet given her permission to depart: I hastened to tender it.

"Spy or no spy, señorita, I shall not detain you. I shall bear the risk: you are free to go."

"*Gracias! cavallero!* And now, since you have behaved so handsomely, I shall set your mind at rest about the *risk*. Read!"

She handed me a folded paper; at a glance I recognised the *safe-guard* of the commander-in-chief, enjoining upon all to respect its bearer—the *Doña Isolina de Vargas*.

"You perceive, mio capitan, I was not your captive after all? ha! ha! ha!"

"Lady, you are too generous not to pardon the rudeness to which you have been subjected?"

"Freely, capitan—freely."

"I shudder at thought of the risk you have run. Why did you act with such imprudence? Your sudden flight at sight of

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our picket caused suspicion, and of course it was our duty to follow and capture you. With the safe-guard, you had no cause for flight."

"Ha! it was that very safe-guard that caused me to fly."

"The safe-guard, señorita? Pray, explain!"

"Can I trust *your* prudence, capitan?"

"I promise"——

"Know, then, that I was not certain you were *Americanos*, for aught I could see, you might have been a guerilla of my *countrymen*. How would it be if this paper, and sundry others I carry, were to fall into the hands of Canales? You perceive, capitan, we fear our *friends* more than our *enemies*."

I now fully comprehended the motive of her wild flight.

"You speak Spanish too well, mio capitan," continued she. "Had you cried 'Halt!' in your native tongue, I should at once have pulled up, and perhaps saved my pet. Ah, me!—*pobre yegua!*"

As she uttered the last exclamation, her feelings once more overcame her; and sinking down upon her knees, she passed her arms around the neck of the mustang, now stiff and cold. Her face was buried in the long thick mane, and I could perceive the tears sparkling like dew-drops over the tossed hair.

"*Pobre Lola*," she continued, "I have good cause to grieve; I had reason to love you well. More than once you saved me from the fierce Lipan and the brutal Comanche. What am I to do now? I dread the Indian foray; I shall tremble at every sign of the savage. I dare no more venture upon the prairie, I dare not go abroad; I must tamely stay at home. *Mia querida!* you were my wings: they are clipped—I fly no more"

All this was uttered in a tone of extreme bitterness; and I, who so loved my brave steed, could appreciate her feelings. With the hope of imparting even a little consolation, I repeated my offer.

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"Señorita," I said, "I have swift horses n my troop—some of noble race"——

"You have no horse in your troop I value."

"You have not seen them all?"

"All—every one of them—to-day, as you filed out of the city."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed, yes, noble capitan. I saw you as you carried yourself so cavalierly at the head of your troop of *filibusteros*—ha, ha, ha!"

"Señorita, I saw not you."

"*Carrambo!* it was not for the want of using your eyes There was not a *balcon* or *reja* into which you did not glance—not a smile in the whole street you did not seem anxious to reciprocate—ha, ha, ha! I fear, Señor Capitan, you are the Don Juan de Tenorio of the North."

"Lady, it is not my character."

"Nonsense, you are proud of it. I never saw man who was not. But come! a truce to badinage. About the horse—you have none in your troop I value, save *one*."

I trembled as she spoke.

"It is *he*," she continued, pointing to Moro.

I felt as if I should sink into the earth. My embarrassment prevented me for some time from replying. She noticed my hesitation, but remained silent, awaiting my answer.

"Señorita," I stammered out at length, "that steed is a great favorite—an old and tried friend. *If* you desire—to possess him, he is—he is at your service."

In emphasizing the "if," I was appealing to her generosity. It was to no purpose.

"Thank you," she replied, coolly; "he shall be well cared for No doubt he will serve my purpose. *How is his mouth?*"

I was choking with vexation, and could not reply. I began hate her.

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"Let me try him," continued she. "Ah! you have a curb bit—that will do; but it is not equal to ours. I use a mame luke. Help me to that lazo."

She pointed to a lazo of white horsehair, beautifully plaited that was coiled upon the saddle of the mustang.

I unloosed the rope—mechanically I did—and in the same way adjusted it to the horn of my saddle. I noticed that the noose-ring was of silver! I shortened the leathers to the proper length.

"Now, capitan!" cried she, gathering the reins in her small gloved hand—"now I shall see how he performs."

At the word, she bounded into the saddle, her small foot scarcely touching the stirrup. She had thrown off her manga, and her woman's form was now displayed in all its undulating outlines. The silken skirt draped down to her ankles, and underneath appeared the tiny red boot, the glancing spur, and the lace ruffle of her snow-white *calzoncillos*. A scarlet sash bound her waist, with its fringed ends drooping to the saddle; and the tight bodice, lashed with lace, displayed the full rounding of her bosom, as it rose and fell in quiet, regular beating—for she seemed in no way excited or nervous. Her full round eye expressed only calmness and courage.

I stood transfixed with admiration. I thought of the Amazons: were they beautiful like her? With a troop of such warriors one might *conquer a world!*

A fierce-looking bull, moved by curiosity or otherwise, had separated from the herd, and was seen approaching the spot where we were. This was just what the fair rider wanted. At a touch of the spur, the horse sprang forward, and galloped directly for the bull. The latter, cowed at the sudden onset, turned and ran; but his swift pursuer soon came within lazo distance. The noose circled in the air, and, launched forward, was seen to settle around the horns of the animal. The horse was now wheeled round, and headed in an opposite direction. The rope tightened with a sudden pluck, and the bull was thrown

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with violence on the plain, where he lay stunned and apparently lifeless. Before he had time to recover himself, the rider turned her horse, trotted up to the prostrate animal, bent over in the saddle, unfastened the noose, and, after coiling it upon her arm, came galloping back.

"Superb!—magnificent!" she exclaimed, leaping from the saddle, and gazing at the steed. "Beautiful!—most beautiful! Ah Lola, poor Lola! I fear I shall soon forget thee!" The last words were addressed to the mustang. Then turning to me, she added: "And this horse is mine?"

"Yes, lady, if you will it," I replied, somewhat cheerlessly, for I felt as if my best friend was about to be taken from me.

"But I do *not* will it," said she, with an air of determination; and then breaking into a laugh, she cried out: "Ha! capitan, I know your thoughts. Think you I cannot appreciate the sacrifice you would make? Keep your favorite. Enough that one of us should suffer;" and she pointed to the mustang. "Keep the brave black; you well know how to ride him. Were he mine, no mortal could influence me to part with him."

"There is *but one* who could influence *me*."

As I said this, I looked anxiously for the answer. It was not in words I expected it, but in the glance. Assuredly there was no frown; I even fancied I could detect a smile—a blending of triumph and satisfaction. It was short-lived, and my heart fell again under her light laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha! That one is of course your lady-love. Well, noble capitan, if you are true to her, as to your brave steed, she will have no cause to doubt your fealty. I must leave you. Adios!"

"Shall I not be permitted to accompany you to your home?"

"*Gracias!* no, señor. I am at home. *Mira!* my father's house!" She pointed to the hacienda. "Here is one who will look to the remains of poor Lola;" and she signalled to a vaquero at that moment coming from the herd. "Remember

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capitan, you are an enemy; I must not accept your politeness neither may I offer you hospitality. Ah! you know not us—you know not the tyrant Santa Anna. Perhaps even at this moment his spies are"—— She glanced suspiciously around as she spoke. "O Heavens!" she exclaimed with a start, as her eyes fell upon the form of a man advancing down the hill "*Santisima Virgen!* it is Ijurra!"

"Ijurra?"

"Only my cousin; but"—— She hesitated, and then suddenly changing to an expression of entreaty, she continued: "O leave me, señor! *Por amor Dios!* leave me! Adieu, adieu!"

Though I longed to have a nearer view of Ijurra," the hurried earnestness of her manner overcame me; and without making other reply than a simple "Adios," I vaulted into my saddle, and rode off.

On reaching the border of the woods, curiosity—a stronger feeling, perhaps—mastered my politeness; and, under the pretence of adjusting my stirrup, I turned in the saddle, and glanced back. Ijurra had arrived upon the ground. I beheld a tall, dark man, dressed in the usual costume of the ricos of Mexico: dark cloth polka jacket, blue military trousers, with scarlet sash around his waist, and low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat upon his head. He appeared about thirty years of age, whiskered, moustached, and, after a fashion, handsome. It was not his age, nor his personal appearance, nor yet his costume, that had my attention at the moment. I watched only his actions. He stood confronting his cousin, or rather he stood *over* her, for she appeared to cower before him in an attitude of fear! He held a paper in one hand, and I saw he was pointing to it as he spoke. There was a fierce, vulture-like expression upon his face; and even in the distance I could tell, from the tones of his voice, that he was talking angrily. Why should she fear him? Why submit to such rude rebuke? He must have

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a strange power over that spirit who could force t thus tamely to listen to reproach?

These were my reflections. My impulse was to drive the spurs into the sides of my horse, and gallop back upon the ground. I might have done so had the scene lasted much longer but I saw the lady suddenly leave the spot, and walk rapidly in the direction of the hacienda.

I wheeled round again, and plunging under the shadows of the forest, soon fell into a road leading to the rancheria. My thoughts full of the incident that had just passed, I rode unconsciously, leaving my horse to his own guidance. My reverie was interrupted by the challenge of one of my own sentries, which admonished me that I had arrived at the entrance of the village.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ORDER TO FORAGE.

My adventure did not end with the day; it was continued into the night, and repeated in my dreams. I rode the chase over again; I dashed through the magueys, I leaped the *zequia*, and galloped through the affrighted herd; I beheld the spotted mustang stretched lifeless upon the plain, its rider bending and weeping over it. That face of rare beauty, that form of exquisite proportion, that eye rotund and noble, that tongue so free, and heart so bold—all were again encountered in dreamland. A dark face was in the vision, and at intervals crossed the picture like a cloud. It was the face of Ijurra.

I think it was that awoke me, but the *réveillé* of the bugle was in my ears as I leaped from my couch.

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For some moments I was under the impression that the adventure had been a dream: an object that hung on the opposite wall came under my eyes, and recalled the reality—it was my saddle, over the holsters of which lay a coil of white horse hair rope, with a silver ring at the end. I remembered the lazo.

When fairly awake, I reviewed my yesterday's adventure from first to last. I tried to think calmly upon it; I tried to get out of my thoughts, and return seriously to my duties. A vain attempt! The more I reflected upon the incident, the more I became conscious of the powerful interest its heroine had excited within me. Interest, indeed! Say rather *passion*—a passion that in one single hour had grown as large as my heart!

It was not the *first* love of my life. I was nigh thirty years of age. I had been enamored before—more than once, it may be—and I understood what the feeling was. I needed no Cupid to tell me I was in love again—to the very ends of my fingers.

To paint the object of my passion is a task I shall not attempt. Beauty like hers must be left to the imagination. Think of the woman you *yourself* love or have loved; fancy her in her fairest moments, in bower or boudoir—perchance a blushing bride—and you may form some idea—— No, no, no! you could never have looked upon woman so lovely as Isolina de Vargas

Oh! that I could fix that fleeting phantom of beauty—that I could paint that likeness for the world to admire! It cannot be. The most puissant pen is powerless, the brightest color too cold. Though deeply graven upon the tablets of my heart, I cannot multiply the impression.

It is idle to talk of wavy hair, profuse and glossed—of almond eyes with long dark fringes—of pearl-white teeth, and cheeks tinted with damascene. All these had she, but they are not peculiar characteristics. Other women are thus gifted. The traits of *her* beauty lay in the intellectual as much as the physical—in a happy combination of both. The soul, the spirit, had

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its share in producing this incomparable picture. It was to behold the play of those noble features, to watch the changing cheek, the varying smile, the falling lash, the flashing eye, the glance now tender, now sublime—it was to look on all this, to be impressed with an idea of the divinest loveliness.

* * * * * * *

As I ate my frugal breakfast, such a vision was passing before me. I contemplated the future with pleasant hopes, but not without feelings of uneasiness. I had not forgotten the abrupt parting—no invitation to renew the acquaintance, no hope, no prospect that I should ever behold that beautiful woman again, unless blind chance should prove my friend.

I am not a fatalist, and I therefore resolved not to rely upon mere destiny, but, if possible, to help it a little in its evolution.

Before I had finished my coffee, a dozen schemes had passed through my mind, all tending towards one object—the renewal of my acquaintance with Isolina de Vargas. Unless favored by some lucky accident, or, what was more desirable, *by the lady herself*, I knew we might never meet again. In such times, it was not likely she would be much "out of doors;" and in a few days, hours perhaps, *I* might be ordered *en route* never more to return to that interesting outpost. As the district was, of course, under martial law, and I was *de facto* dictator, you will imagine that I might easily procure the right of entry anywhere. Not so Whatever be the license of the rude soldier as regards the common people of a conquered country, the position of the officer with its higher class is essentially different. If a gentleman, he naturally feels a delicacy in making any advances towards an acquaintance; and his honor restrains him from th freer forms of introduction. To take advantage of his positio of power would be a positive meanness, of which a true gentle man cannot be guilty. Besides, there may be rancour on the part of the conquered—there usually is; but even when no feeling exists, another barrier stands n the way of free asso

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ciation between the officer and "society." The latter feels that the position of affairs will not be permanent; the enemy will in time evacuate, and then the vengeance of mob-patriotism is to be dreaded. Never did the ricos of Mexico feel more secure than while under the protection of the American army. Many of them were disposed to be friendly, but the phantom of the future, with its mob *émeutes*, stared them in the face, and under this dread they were forced to adopt a hypocritical exclusiveness. Epaulettes must not be seen glancing through the windows of their drawing-rooms!

Under such circumstances, my situation was difficult enough. I might gaze upon the outside walls of that handsome hacienda till my heart ached, but how was I to effect an entrance?

To charge a fort, a battery, an intrenched camp—to storm a castle, or break a solid square—one or all would have been child's play compared with the difficulty of crossing that glacial line of etiquette that separated me from my beautiful enemy.

To effect this purpose, a dozen schemes were passed through my mind, and rejected, till my eyes at length rested upon the most interesting object in the apartment—the little white rope that hung upon my saddle-bow. In the lazo, I recognized my 'forlorn-hope.' That pretty implement must be returned to its owner. I *myself should take it home!* So far *destiny* should be guided by *me;* beyond, I should have to put my trust in destiny.

I think best under the influence of a cigar; and lighting one, I ascended to the azotea, to complete my little scheme.

I had scarcely made two turns of the roof, when a horseman galloped into the plaza. He was in dragoon uniform, and I saw he was an orderly from head-quarters, and inquiring for the commander of the outpost. One of the men pointed to me; and the orderly trotting forward, drew up in front of the alcalde's house, and announced to me that he was the bearer of a dispatch from the general-in-chief, at the same time showing a folded paper. I directed him to pass it up on the point of his sabre, which he did;

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and then saluting me, he turned his horse and galloped back as he had come.

I opened the dispatch, and read:

"HEAD-QUARTERS, ARMY OF OCCUPATION
July —th, 1846.

"SIR—You will take a sufficient number of your men, and proceed to the hacienda of Don Ramon de Vargas, in the neighbourhood of your station. You will there find 5,000 head of beeves, which you will cause to be driven to the camp of the American army, and delivered to the commissary-general. You will find the necessary drivers upon the ground, and a portion of your troop will form the escort. The enclosed *note* will enable you to understand the nature of your duty.

"—— ——,

"CAPTAIN WARFIELD." "A. A. Adjutant-general."

"Surely," thought I, as I finished reading—"surely there is a "Providence that shapes our ends." Just as I was cudgelling my brains for some scheme of introduction to Don Ramon de Vargas, here comes one ready fashioned to my hand."

I thought no more about the lazo: the rope was no longer an object of prime interest. Trimmed and embellished with the graceful excuse of "duty," I should now ride boldly up to the hacienda, and enter its gates with the confident air of a welcome guest. Welcome indeed! A contract for 5000 beeves, and at war-prices! A good stroke of business on the part of the old Don. Of course, I shall see him—"embrace him"—hobnob with him over a glass of Canario or Xeres—get upon the most intimate terms, and so be "asked back." I am usually popular with old gentlemen, and I trusted to my bright star to place me *en rapport* with Don Ramon de Vargas. The coralling of the cattle would occupy some time—a brace of hours at the least. That would be outside work, and I could intrust it to my lieutenant or a sergeant. For myself, I was determined to stay by the

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walls. The Don must go out to look after his vaqueros It would be rude to leave me alone. He would introduce me to his daughter—he could not do less: a customer on so large a scale! We should be left to ourselves, and then—— Ha! Ijurra! I had forgotten *him*. Would *he* be there?

The recollection of this man fell like a shadow over the bright fancies I had conjured up.

A dispatch from head-quarters calls for prompt attention, and my reflections were cut short by the necessity of carrying the order into execution. Without loss of time, I issued orders for about fifty of the rangers to "boot and saddle."

I was about to give more than ordinary attention to my toilet, when it occurred to me I might as well first read the "note" referred to in the dispatch. I opened the paper; to my surprise, the document was in Spanish. This did not puzzle me and I read:

"The 5000 beeves are ready for you, according to the contract, but *I* cannot take upon me to deliver them. *They must be taken from me* with *show of force;* and even a *little rudeness* on the part of those you send would not be out of place. My vaqueros are at your service, but *I* must not command them. You may *press* them.

"RAMON DE VARGAS."

This note was addressed to the commissary-general of the American army. Its meaning, though to the uninitiated a little obscure, was to me as clear as noonday; and although it gave me a high opinion of the administrative talents of Don Ramon de Vargas, it was by no means a welcome document. It rendered null every act of the fine programme I had sketched out. By its directions, there was to be no "embracing," no hobnobbing over wine, no friendly chat with the Don, no *tête-à-tête* with his beautiful daughter—no; but, on the contrary, I was to ride up with a swagger, bang the doors, threaten the trembling porter, kick

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the peons, and demand from their master 5000 head of beef-cattle—all in true freebooting style!

A nice figure I shall cut, thought I, in the eyes of Isolina; but a little reflection convinced me that that intelligent creature would be in the secret. Yes, she will understand my motives. I can act with as much mildness as circumstances will permit.—My Texan lieutenant will do the kicking of the peons, and that without much pressing. If she be not cloistered, I will have a glimpse at her; so here goes. "*To Horse!*"

The bugle gave the signal; fifty rangers—with Lieutenants Holingsworth and Wheatley—leaped into their saddles, and next moment were filing by twos from the plaza, myself at their head.

A twenty minutes' trot brought us to the front gate of the hacienda, where we halted. The great door, massive and jail-like, was closed, locked, and barred; the shutters of the windows as well. Not a soul was to be seen outside, not even the apparition of a frightened peon. I had given my Texan lieutenant his cue; he knew enough of Spanish for the purpose.

Flinging himself out of the saddle, he approached the gate, and commenced hammering upon it with the butt of his pistol.

"*Ambre la puerta!*" (Open the door!) cried he.

No answer

"*La puerta—la puerta!*" he repeated in a louder tone. Still no answer.

"*Ambre la puerta!*" once more vociferated the lieutenant, at the same time thundering on the woodwork with his weapon.

When the noise ceased, a faint "*Quien es?*" (Who is it?) was heard from within.

"*Yo!*" hawled Wheatley, "*ambre! ambre!*"

"*Si, señor,*" answered the voice, in a somewhat tremulous key.

"*Anda! anda! Somos hombres de bien.*" (Quick then! We are honest men.)

A rattling of chains and shooting of bolts now commenced, and lasted for at least a couple of minutes, at the end of which

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time the great folding-doors opened inward, displaying to view the swarthy leather-clad *portero*, the brick-paved *saguan*, and a portion of the *patio*, or courtyard within.

As soon as the door was fairly open, Wheatley made a rush at the trembling porter, caught him by the jerkin, boxed both his ears, and then commanded him, in a loud voice, to summon the *dueño!* This conduct, somewhat unexpected on the part of the rangers, seemed to be just to their taste; and I could hear behind me the whole troop chuckling in half-suppressed laughter. *Guerilleros* as they were, they had never been allowed much license in their dealings with the inhabitants—the non-combatants—of the country, and much less had they witnessed such conduct on the part of their officers. Indeed, it was cause of complaint in the ranks of the American army, and with many officers too, that even hostile Mexicans were treated with a lenient consideration denied to themselves. Wheatley's behaviour, therefore, touched a chord in the hearts of our following, that vibrated pleasantly enough; they began to believe that the campaign was about to become a little more jolly.

"*Señor*," stammered the porter, "the du—du—dueño has given or—orders—he wi—wi—will not s—see any one."

"*Will* not!" echoed Wheatley; "go, tell him he *must!*"

"Yes, *amigo*," I said soothingly; for I began to fear the man would be too badly frightened to deliver his message. "Go, say to your master that an American officer has business with him, and *must* see him immediately."

The man went off, after a little more persuasion from the free hand of Wheatley, of course leaving the gates open behind him.

We did not wait for his return. The patio looked inviting; and directing Holingsworth to remain outside with the men, and the Texan lieutenant to follow me, I headed my horse for the great archway, and rode in.

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CHAPTER VIII.

DON RAMON.

On entering the courtyard, a somewhat novel scene presented itself—a Spanish picture, with some transatlantic touches. The *patio* of a Mexican house is its proper front. Here you no longer look upon jail-like doors and windows, but façades gaily frescoed, curtained verandahs, and glazed sashes that reach to the ground. The patio of Don Ramon's mansion was paved with brick. A fountain, with its tank of japanned mason-work, stood in the centre; orange-trees stretched their fronds over the water: their golden globes and white wax-like flowers perfumed the atmosphere, which, cooled by the constant evaporation of the *jet d'eau*, felt fresh and fragrant. Round three sides of the court extended a verandah, its floor of painted tiles rising but a few inches above the level of the paved court. A row of *portales* supported the roof of this verandah, and the whole corridor was railed in, and curtained. The curtains were close-drawn, and except at one point—the entrance between two of the portales—the corridor was completely screened from our view, and consequently all the windows of the house, which opened into the verandah. No human face greeted our searching glances. In looking to the rear, into the great *corral*, or cattle-yard, we could see numerous peons in their brown leathern dresses, with naked legs and sandalled feet; vaqueros in all their grandeur of velveteens, bell-buttons, and gold or silver lace; with a number of women and young girls in colored *naguas* and rebosos. A busy scene was presented in that quarter. It was the great cattle enclosure, for the estate of Don Ramon de

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Vargas was a *hacienda de ganados*, or grand cattle-farm—a title which in no way detracts from the presumed respectability of its owner, many of the noble hidalgos of Mexico being only *graziers* on a large scale.

On entering the patio, I only glanced back at the corral; my eyes were busy with the curtained verandah, and, failing there, were carried up to the azotea, in hopes of discovering the object of my thoughts. The house, as I have elsewhere stated, was but a single story in height, and from the saddle, I could almost look into the azotea. I could see that it was a sanctuary of rare plants, and the broad leaves and bright corollas of some of the taller ones appeared over the edge of the parapet. Abundance of fair flowers I could perceive, but not that for which I was looking. No face yet showed, no voice greeted us with a welcome. The shouts of the vaqueros, the music of singing-birds caged along the corridor, and the murmur of the fountain, were the only sounds. The two former suddenly became hushed, as the hoofs of our horses rang upon the stone pavement, and the heedless water alone continued to utter its soft monotone. Once more my eyes swept the curtain, gazing intently into the few apertures left by a careless draping; once more they sought the azotea, and glanced along the parapet: my scrutiny still remained unrewarded.

Without exchanging a word, Wheatley and I sat silent in our saddles, awaiting the return of the portero. Already the peons, vaqueros, and wenches had poured in through the back gateway, and stood staring with astonishment at the unexpected guests. After a considerable pause, the tread of feet was heard upon the corridor, and presently the messenger appeared, and announced that the *dueño* was coming. In a minute after, one of the curtains was drawn back, and an old gentleman made his appearance behind the railing. He was a person of large frame, and although slightly stooping with age, his step was firm, and his whole aspect bespoke a wonderful energy and resolution

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His eyes were large and brilliant, shadowed by heavy brows, upon which the hair still retained its dark color, although that of his head was white as snow. He was simply habited—in a jacket of nankeen cloth, and wide trousers of like material. He wore neither waistcoat nor cravat. A full white shirt of finest linen covered his breast, and a sash of dull blue color was twisted round his waist. On his head was a costly hat of the "Guayaquil grass," and in his fingers a husk cigarrito, smoking at the end.

Altogether, the aspect of Don Ramon—for it was he—despite its assumed sternness, was pleasing and intelligent; and I should have relished a friendly chat with him, even upon his own account.

This, however, was out of the question. I must abide by the spirit of my orders; the farce must be played out; so, touching the flanks of my horse, I rode forward to the edge of the verandah, and placed myself *vis-à-vis* to the Don.

"Are you Don Ramon de Vargas?"

"Si, señor," was the reply, in a tone of angry astonishment.

"I am an officer of the American army"—I spoke loud, and in Spanish, of course, for the benefit of the peons and vaqueros. "I am sent to offer you a contract to supply the army with beeves. I have here an order from the general-in-chief ——"

"I have no beeves for sale," interrupted Don Ramon in a loud indignant voice; "I shall have nothing to do with the American army."

"Then, sir," retorted I, "I must take your beeves without your consent. You will be paid for them, but take them I must; my orders require that I should do so. Moreover, your vaqueros must accompany us, and drive the cattle to the American camp."

As I said this, I signalled to Holingsworth, who rode in with his following; and then the whole troop, filing through the back

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gateway, began to collect the frightened vaqueros, and set them about their work.

"I protest against this robbery!" shouted Don Ramon. "It is infamous—contrary to the laws of civilized warfare. I shall appeal to my government—to yours—I shall have redress."

"You shall have payment, Don Ramon," said I, apparently trying to pacify him.

"Payment, *carrambo!*—payment from robbers, *filibusteros*" ——

"Come, come, old gentleman!" cried Wheatley, who was only half behind the scenes, and who spoke rather in earnest, "keep a good tongue in your head, or you may lose something of more value to you than your cattle. Remember whom you are talking to."

"*Tejanos! ladrones!*" hissed Don Ramon, with an earnest application of the latter phrase that would certainly have brought Wheatley's revolver from his belt, had I not, at the moment, whispered a word in the lieutenant's ear.

"Hang the old rascal!" muttered he, in reply to me; "I thought he *was* in earnest. Look here, old fellow!" he continued, addressing himself to Don Ramon, "don't you be scared about the dollars. Uncle Sam's a liberal trader and a good paymaster. I wish your beef was mine, and I had *his* promise to pay for it. So take things a little easier, if you please; and don't be so free of your 'filibusteros' and 'ladrones:' freeborn Texans ain't used to such talk."

Don Ramon suddenly cut short the colloquy by angrily closing the curtains, and hiding himself from our sight.

During the whole scene, I had great difficulty in controlling my countenance. I could perceive that the Mexican labored under a similar difficulty. There was a laughing devil in the corner of his keen eye that required restraint; and I thought once or twice either he or I should lose our equanimity. I certainly should have done so, but that my heart and eyes were

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most of the time in other quarters. As for the Don, he was playing an important part; and a suspicion of his hypocrisy, on the minds of some of the leathern-clad *greasers* who listened to the dialogue, might have afterwards brought him to trouble Most of them were his own domestics and retainers, but not all There were free *rancheros* among them—some who belonged to the pueblita itself—some, perchance, who had figured in *pronunciamentos*—who voted at elections, and called themselves *citizens* The Don, therefore, had good reasons for assuming a character; and well did the old gentleman sustain it.

As he drew the curtain, his half-whispered "Adios, capitan!" heard only by myself, sounded full of sweetness and *promise*, and I felt rather contented as I straightened myself in the saddle, and issued the order for *rieving* his cattle.

CHAPTER IX.

"UN PAPELCITO."

WHEATLEY now rode after the troop, which with Holingsworth had already entered the corral. A band of drivers was speedily pressed into service; and with these the two lieutenants proceeded to the great plain at the foot of the hill, where most of Don Ramon's cattle were at pasture. By this arrangement I was left alone, if I except the company of half-a-dozen slippered wenches, the deities of the *cocina*, who, clustered in the corner of the patio, eyed me with mingled looks of curiosity and fear. The verandah curtains remained hermetically closed, and though I glanced at every aperture that offered a chance to an observing eye, no one appeared to be stirring behind them.

"Too high-bred—perhaps indifferent?" thought I. The latter

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supposition was by no means gratifying to my vanity. "After all, now that the others are gone out of the way, Don Ramon *might* ask me to step inside. Ah! no—these mestizo women would tell tales: I perceive it would never do. I may as well give it up. I shall ride out, and join the troop."

As I turned my horse to put this design into execution, the fountain came under my eyes. Its water reminded me that I was thirsty, for it was a July day, and a hot one. A gourd cup lay on the edge of the tank. Without dismounting, I was able to lay hold of the vessel, and filling it with the cool sparkling liquid, I drained it off. It was very good water, but not Canario or Xeres.

Sweeping the curtain once more, I turned with a disappointed glance, and jagging my horse, rode doggedly out through the back gateway. Once in the rear of the buildings, I had a full view of the great meadow already known to me; and pulling up, I sat in the saddle, and watched the animated scene that was there being enacted. Bulls, half wild, rushing to and fro in mad fury; vaqueros mounted on their light mustangs, with streaming sash and winding lazo; rangers upon their heavier steeds, offering but a clumsy aid to the more adroit and practised herdsmen; others driving off large groups that had been already collected and brought into subjection: and all this amidst the fierce bellowings of the bulls, the shouts and laughter of the delighted troopers, the shriller cries of the vaqueros and peons. The whole formed a picture that, under other circumstances, I should have contemplated with interest. Just then, my spirits were not attuned to its enjoyment, and although I remained for some minutes with my eyes fixed upon it, my thoughts wandered elsewhere.

I confess to a strong faith in woman's curiosity. That such a scene could be passing under the windows of the most aristocratic mansion, without its most aristocratic inmate deigning to take a peep at it, I could not believe. Besides, Isolina was the very

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reverse. "Ha! Despite that jealous curtain, those beautiful eyes are glancing through some aperture—window or loophole. I doubt not;" and with this reflection, I once more turned my face to the buildings.

Just then, it occurred to me that I had not sufficiently reconnoitred the *front* of the dwelling. As we approached it, we had observed that the shutters of the windows were closed; but these opened inward, and since that time one or other of them might have been set a little ajar. From my knowledge of Mexican interiors, I knew that these front windows were those of the principal apartments—of the *sala* and grand *cuarto*, or drawing-room—precisely those where the inmates at that hour should be found.

"Fool!" thought I, "to have remained so long in the patio. Had I gone round to the front windows I might have—— 'Tis not too late—there's a chance yet."

Under the impulse of this new hope, I rode back through the corral, and re-entered the patio. The brown-skinned mestizas were still there, chattering and flurried as ever, and the curtain had not been stirred. A glance at it was all I gave; and without stopping, I walked my horse across the paved court, and entered under the arched *saguan*. The massive gate stood open, as we had left it; and on looking into the little box of the portero, I perceived that it was empty. The man had hid himself, in dread of a second interview with the Texan lieutenant!

In another moment, I had emerged from the gateway, and was about turning my horse to inspect the windows, when I heard the word "Capitan," pronounced in a voice that sounded soft as a silver bell, and thrilled to my heart like a strain of music.

I looked towards the windows. It came not thence; they were close shut as ever. Whence—— Before I had time to ask myself the question, the "Capitan" was repeated in a somewhat louder key, and I now perceived that the voice proceeded from above—from the azotea.

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I wrenched my horse round, at the same time turning my eyes upward. I could see no one; but just at that moment an arm, that might have been attached to the bust of Venus, was protruded through a notch in the parapet. In the small hand, wickedly sparkling with jewels, was something white, which I could not distinguish until I saw it projected on the grass—at the same moment that the phrase "Un papelcito" reached my ears.

Without hesitation I dismounted—made myself master of the *papelcito;* and then leaping once more into the saddle, looked upward. I had purposely drawn my horse some distance from the walls, so that I might command a better view. I was not disappointed—Isolina! The face, that lovely face, was just distinguishable through the slender embrasure, the large brown eyes gazing upon me with that half-earnest, half-mocking glance I had already noticed, and which produced within me both pleasure and pain!

I was about to speak to her, when I saw the expression suddenly change; a hurried glance was thrown backwards, as if the approach of some one disturbed her; a finger rested momentarily on her lips, and then her face disappeared behind the screening wall of the parapet. I understood the universal sign, and remained silent.

For some moments I was undecided whether to go or stay.—She had evidently withdrawn from the front of the building, though she was still upon the azotea. Some one had joined her; and I could hear voices in conversation; her own contrasting with the harsher tones of a man. Perhaps her father—perhaps—that other *relative*—less agreeable supposition!

I was about to ride off, when it occurred to me that I had better first master the contents of the "papelcito." Perhaps it might throw some light on the situation, and enable me to adopt the more pleasant alternative of remaining a while longer upon the premises. I had thrust the *billet* into the breast of my frock;

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nd now looked around for some place where I might draw it forth and peruse it unobserved. The great arched gateway, shadowy and tenantless, offered the desired accommodation; and heading my horse to it, I once more rode inside the saguan. Facing around so as to hide my front from the *cocineras*, I drew forth the strip of folded paper, and spread it open before me Though written in pencil, and evidently in a hurried impromptu, I had no difficulty in deciphering it. My heart throbbed exultingly as I read:

"Capitan! I know you will pardon our dry hospitality! A cup of cold water—ha! ha! ha! Remember what I told you yesterday: we fear our *friends* more than our *foes*, and we have a *guest in the house my father dreads more than you and your terrible filibusteros.* I am not angry with you for my pet, but you have carried off my lazo as well. Ah, capitan! would you rob me of *everything*?—Adios! ISOLINA."

Thrusting the paper back into my bosom, I sat for some time pondering upon its contents. Part was clear enough—the remaining part full of mystery.

"We fear our *friends* more than our *foes*." I was behind the scenes sufficiently to comprehend what was intended by that cunningly worded phrase. It simply meant that Don Ramon de Vargas was *Ayankieado*—in other words, a friend to the American cause, or, as some loud demagogues would have pronounced him, a "traitor to his country." It did not follow, however, that he was anything of the kind. He might have wished success to the American arms, and still remained a true friend to his country—not one of those blind bigots whose standard displays the brigand motto, "Our country right or wrong," but an enlightened patriot, who desired more to see Mexico enjoy peace and happiness under foreign domination, than that it should continue in anarchy under the iron rule of native despots. What is there in the empty title of *independence*, without peace, without

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liberty? After all, patriotism in its ordinary sense is but a doubtful virtue—perhaps nearer to a crime! It will one day appear so; one day in the far future it will be supplanted by a virtue of higher order—the patriotism that knows no boundaries of nations, but whose *country* is the whole earth. That, however, would *not* be "patriotism!"

Was Don Ramon de Vargas a patriot in this sense—a man of progress, who cared not that the *name* of "Mexico" should be blotted from the map, so long as peace and prosperity should be given to his country under another name? Was Don Ramon one of these? It might be. There were many such in Mexico at that time, and these principally of the class to which Senor de Vargas belonged—the *ricos*, or proprietors. It is easy enough to explain why the Ayankieados were of the class of ricos.

Perhaps the affection of Don Ramon for the American cause had less lofty motives; perhaps the 5000 beeves may have had something to do with it? Whether or no, I could not tell; nor did I stay to consider. I only reflected upon the matter at all as offering an explanation to the ambiguous phrase now twice used by his fair daughter—"We fear our *friends* more than our *foes*." On either supposition, the meaning was clear.

What followed was far from equally perspicuous. *A guest in the house dreaded by her father!* Here was mystery indeed. Who could that guest be?—Who but *Ijurra!*

But Ijurra was her cousin—she had said so. If a cousin, why should he be dreaded? Was there still another guest in the house? That might be: I had not been inside to see. The mansion was large enough to accommodate another—half a score of others. For all that, my thoughts constantly turned upon Ijurra, and why I know not; but I could not resist the belief that he was the person pointed at—the guest that was "dreaded!"

The behavior which I had noticed on the day before—the first and only time I had ever seen the man—his angry speech

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and looks addressed to Isolina—her apparent fear of him these it was, no doubt, that guided my instincts; and I at length came to the conviction that he was the fiend dreaded by Don Ramon. And she too feared him! "God grant that she do not also love him!"

Such was my mental ejaculation, as I passed on to consider the closing sentences of the hastily written note. In these I also encountered ambiguity of expression; whether I construed it aright, time would tell. Perhaps my wish was too much parent to my thoughts; but it was with exulting heart I rode out from the gateway.

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD ENMITY.

I RODE slowly, and but a few paces before reining up my horse. Although I was under the impression that it would be useless remaining, and that an interview with Isolina was impossible, for that day at least, I could not divest myself of the desire to linger a little longer near the spot. Perhaps she might appear again upon the azotea; if but for a moment; if but to wave her hand, and waft me an adieu; if but——

When a short distance separated me from the walls, I drew up, and turning in the saddle, glanced back to the parapet. A face was there, where hers had been; but, oh, the contrast between her lovely features and those that now met my gaze! Hyperion to the Satyr! Not that the face now before me was ugly or ill-featured. There are some, and women too, who would have termed it handsome: to my eyes, it was hideous! Let me confess that its hideousness, or more properly its cause,

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rested in the moral, rather than the physical expression; perhaps too, a little of it might have been found in my own heart. Under other circumstances, I might not have criticised that face so harshly. All the world did not think as I about the face of Rafael Ijurra—for it was he who was gazing at me over the parapet.

Our eyes met; and that first glance stamped the relationship between us—hostility for life! Not a word passed, and yet the looks of each told the other, in the plainest language, "*I am your foe.*" Had we sworn it in wild oaths, in all the bitter hyperbole of insult, neither of us would have felt it more profound or keen.

I shall not stay to analyze this feeling of sudden and unexpressed hostility, though the philosophy of it is simple enough. You too have experienced it—perhaps more than once in your life, without being exactly able to explain it. I am not in that dilemma: I could explain it easily enough; but it scarcely merits an explanation. Suffice to say, that while gazing upon the face of that man, I entertained it in all its strength.

I have called it an *unexpressed* hostility. Therein I have spoken without thought; it was fully expressed by both of us, though not in words. Words are but weak symbols of a passion, compared with the passion itself, exhibited in the clenched hand, the lip compressed, the flashing eye, the clouded cheek, the quick play of the muscles—weak symbols are words compared with signs like these. No words passed between Ijurra and myself; none were needed. Each read in the other a rival—a rival in love, a competitor for the heart of a lovely woman, the *loveliest* in Mexico! It is needless to say that, under such an aspect, each hated the other at sight.

In the face of Ijurra I read more. I saw before me a man of bad heart and brutal nature. His large, and, to speak the truth, beautiful eyes, had in them an animal expression. They were not without intelligence, but so much the worse, for that

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intelligence expressed ferocity and bad faith. His beauty was the beauty of the jaguar. He had the air of an accomplished man, accustomed to conquest in the field of love—heartless, reckless, false. O mystery of our nature, there are those who love such men!

In Ijurra's face I read more: *he knew my secret!* The significant glance of his eye told me so. He knew why I was lingering there. The satiric smile upon his lip attested it. He saw my efforts to obtain an interview, and, confident in his own position, held my failure but lightly—a something only to amuse him. I could tell all this by the sardonic sneer that sat upon his features.

As we continued to gaze, neither moving his eyes from the other, this sneer became too oppressive to be silently borne. I could no longer stand such a satirical reading of my thoughts. The insult was as marked as words could have made it; and I was about to have recourse to words to reply, when the clatter of a horse's hoofs caused me to turn my eyes in an opposite direction. A horseman was coming up the hill, in a direct line from the pastures. I saw it was one of the lieutenants—Holingsworth.

A few more stretches of his horse brought the lieutenant upon the ground, where he pulled up directly in front of me.

"Captain Warfield!" said he, speaking in an official tone, "the cattle are collected; shall we proceed"——

He proceeded no further with that sentence; his eye, chance directed, was carried up to the azotea, and rested upon the face of Ijurra. He started in his saddle, as if a serpent had stung him; his hollow eyes shot prominently out, glaring wildly from their sockets, while the muscles of his throat and jaws twitched in convulsive action! For a moment, the desperate passion seemed to stifle his breathing, and while thus silent the expression of his eyes puzzled me. It was of frantic joy, and ill became that face where I had never observed a smile. But the

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strange look was soon explained—it was not friendship, but the joy of anticipated vengeance! Breaking into a wild laugh he shrieked out, "Rafael Ijurra, by the eternal God!"

This awful and emphatic recognition produced its effect. I saw that Ijurra knew the man who addressed him. His dark countenance turned suddenly pale, and then became mottled with livid spots, while his eyes scintillated and rolled about in the unsteady glances of terror. He made no reply beyond the ejaculation "Demonio!" which seemed involuntarily to escape him. He appeared unable to reply; surprise and fright held him spell-bound and speechless!

"Traitor! villain! murderer!" shrieked Holingsworth, "we've met at last; now for a squaring of our accounts!" and in the next instant the muzzle of his rifle was pointing to the notch in the parapet—pointing to the face of Ijurra!

"Hold! Holingsworth!—hold!" cried I, pressing my heel deeply into my horse's flanks, and dashing forward.

Though my steed sprang instantly to the spur, and as quickly I caught the lieutenant's arm, I was too late to arrest the shot. I spoiled his aim, however; and the bullet, instead of passing through the brain of Rafael Ijurra, as it would certainly have done, glanced upon the mortar of the parapet, sending a cloud of lime-dust into his face.

Up to that moment the Mexican had made no attempt to escape beyond the aim of his antagonist. Terror must have glued him to the spot It was only when the report of the rifle, and the blinding mortar broke the spell, that he was able to turn and fly. When the dust cleared away, his head was no longer above the wall.

I turned to my companion, and addressed him in some warmth.

"Lieutenant Holingsworth! I command"——

"Captain Warfield," interrupted he, in a tone of cold determination. "you may command me in all matters of duty, and I were not w

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shall obey you. This is a private affair; and, by the Eternal, the general himself—— Bah! I lose time; the villain will escape!" and before I could seize either himself or his bridle-rein, he shot his horse past me and entered the gateway at a gallop.

I followed as quickly as I could, and reached the patio almost as soon as he; but too late to hinder him from his purpose. I grasped him by the arm, but with determined strength he wrenched himself free—at the same instant gliding out of his saddle. Pistol in hand, he rushed up the *escalera*, his trailing scabbard clanking upon the stone steps as he went. He was soon out of my sight, behind the parapet of the azotea.

Flinging myself from the saddle, I followed as fast as my legs would carry me. While on the stairway, I heard loud words and oaths above, the crash of falling objects, and then two shots following quick and fast upon each other. I heard screaming in a woman's voice, and a groan—the last uttered by a man. One of them is dead or dying, thought I.

On reaching the azotea—which I did in a few seconds of time—I found perfect silence there. I saw no one, male or female, living or dead! True, the place was like a garden, with plants, shrubs, and even trees, growing in gigantic pots. I could not view it all at once. They might still be there behind the screen of leaves?

I ran to and fro over the whole roof; I saw flower-pots freshly broken. It was the crash of them I had heard coming up. I saw no men, neither Holingsworth nor Ijurra! They could not be standing up, or I should have seen them. "Perhaps they are down among the pots—both. There were two shots. Perhaps both are down—dead!"

But where was she who screamed? Was it Isolina?

Half distracted, I rushed to another part of the roof. I saw a small escalera—a private stair—that led into the interior of

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the house. Ha! they must have gone down by it? she who screamed must have gone that way?

For a moment, I hesitated to follow; but it was no time to stand upon etiquette, and I was preparing to plunge down the stairway, when I heard shouting outside the walls, and then another shot from a pistol.

I turned, and stepped hastily across the azotea in the direction of the sounds. I looked over the parapet. Down the slope of the hill two men were running at the top of their speed, one after the other. The hindmost held in his hand a drawn sabre. It was Holingsworth still in pursuit of Ijurra!

The latter appeared to be gaining upon his vengeful pursuer, who, burdened with his accoutrements, ran heavily. The Mexican was evidently making for the woods that began at the bottom of the hill; and in a few seconds more he had entered the timber, and passed out of sight. Like a hound upon the trail, Holingsworth followed, and disappeared from my view at the same spot.

Hoping I might still be able to prevent the shedding of blood, I descended hastily from the azotea, mounted my horse, and galloped down the hill. I reached the edge of the woods where they had gone in, and followed some distance upon their trail; but I lost it at length, and came to a halt. I remained for some minutes listening for voices, or, what I more expected to hear, the report of a pistol. Neither sound reached me. I heard only the shouts of the vaqueros on the other side of the hill; and this reminding me of my duty, I turned my horse, and rode back to the hacienda.

There, everything was silent: not a face was to be seen. The inmates of the house had hidden themselves in rooms, barred up and dark; even the damsels of the kitchen had disappeared, thinking, no doubt, that an attack would be made upon the premises, and that spoliation and plunder were intended

I was puzzled how to act. Holingsworth's strange conduct

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had disarranged my ideas. I should have demanded admission, and explained the occurrence to Don Ramon; but I had no explanation to give; I rather needed one for myself; and under a painful feeling of suspense as to the result, I rode off from the place.

Half-a-dozen rangers were left upon the ground, with orders to await the return of Holingsworth, and then gallop after us; while the remainder of the troop, with Wheatley and myself in advance of the vast drove, took the route for the American ta . .

CHAPTER XI.

RAFAEL IJURRA.

In ill-humor I journeyed along. The hot sun and the dusty road did not improve my temper, ruffled as it was by the unpleasant incident. I was far from satisfied with my first-lieutenant, whose conduct was still a mystery. Wheatley could not explain it. Some old enmity, no doubt, both of us believed--some story of wrong and revenge.

No everyday man was Holingsworth, but one altogether of peculiar character and temperament—as unlike him who rode by my side as acid to alkali. The latter was a dashing, cheerful fellow, dressed in half-Mexican costume, who could ride a wild horse and throw the lazo with any vaquero in the crowd. He was a true Texan, almost by birth; had shared the fortunes of the young republic since the days of Austin; and was never more happy than while engaged in the border warfare, that, with slight intervals, had been carried on against either Mexican or Indian foeman, ever since the lone-star had spread its banner

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to the breeze. No raw recruit was Wheatley; though young he was what Texans term an "old Indian fighter"—a real "Texas ranger."

Holingsworth was not a Texan, but a Tennessean, though Texas had been for some years his adopted home. It was not the first time he had crossed the Rio Grande. He had been one of the unfortunate Mier expedition—a survivor of that decimated band—afterwards carried in chains to Mexico, and there compelled to work breast-deep in the mud of the great *zanjas* that traverse the streets. Such experience might account for the serious, somewhat stern expression that habitually rested upon his countenance, and gave him the character of a "dark, saturnine man." I have said incidentally that I never saw him smile—never. He spoke seldom, and, as a general thing, only upon matters of duty; but at times, when he fancied himself alone, I have heard him mutter threats, while a convulsive twitching of the muscles, and a mechanical clenching of the fingers accompanied his words, as though he stood in the presence of some deadly foe! I had more than once observed these frenzied outbursts, without knowing aught of their cause. Harding Holingsworth—such was his full name—was a man with whom no one would have desired to take the liberty of asking an explanation of his conduct. His courage and war-prowess were well known among the Texans; but it is idle to add this, since otherwise he could not have stood among them in the capacity of leader. Men like them, who have the election of their own officers, do not trust their lives to the guidance of either stripling or coward.

Wheatley and I were talking the matter over as we rode along, and endeavoring to account for the strange behavior of Holingsworth. We had both concluded that the affair had arisen from some old enmity—perhaps connected with the Mier expedition—when accidentally I mentioned the Mexican's name. Up to this moment the Texan lieutenant had not seen Ijurra—

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having been busy with the cattle upon the other side of the hill—nor had the name been pronounced in his hearing.

"Ijurra!" he exclaimed, with a start, reining up and turning to me with an inquiring look.

"Ijurra."

"*Rafael* Ijurra, do you think?"

"Yes, Rafael—that is the name."

"A tall, dark fellow, moustached and whiskered?—not ill looking?"

"Yes; he might answer that description," I replied.

"If it be the same Rafael Ijurra that used to live at San Antonio, there's more than one Texan would like to raise *his* hair. The same—it must be—there's no two of the name; 'taint likely—no."

"What do you know of him?"

"Know?—that he's about the most precious scoundrel in all Texas or Mexico either, and that's saying a good deal. Rafael Ijurra? 'Tis he, by thunder! It *can* be nobody else; and Holingsworth—— Ha! now I think of it, it's just the man; and Harding Holingsworth, of all men living, has good reasons to remember *him*."

"How? Explain!"

The Texan paused for a moment, as if to collect his scattered memories, and then proceeded to detail what he knew of Rafael Ijurra. His account, without the expletives and emphatic ejaculations which adorned it, was substantially as follows:

Rafael Ijurra was by birth a Texan of Mexican race. He had formerly possessed a hacienda near San Antonio de Bexar, with other considerable property, all of which he had spent at play or otherwise dissipated, so that he had sunk to the status of professional gambler. Up to the date of the Mier expedition he had passed off as a citizen of Texas, under the new régime, and pretended much patriotic attachment to the young republic

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When the Mier adventure was about being organized, Ijurra had influence enough to have himself elected one of its officers. No one suspected his fidelity to the cause. He was one of those who at the halt by Laredo, urged the impudent advance upon Mier; and his presumed knowledge of the country—of which he was a native—gave weight to his counsel. It afterwards proved that his free advice was intended for the benefit of the enemy, with whom he was in secret correspondence.

On the night before the battle, Ijurra was missing. The Texan army was captured after a brave defence, in which they slew more than their own number of the enemy, and, under guard, the remnant was marched off for the capital of Mexico. On the second or third day of their march, what was the astonishment of the Texan prisoners to see Rafael Ijurra *in the uniform of a Mexican officer, and forming part of their escort!* But that their hands were bound, they would have torn him to pieces, so enraged were they at this piece of black treason.

"I was not in that ugly scrape," continued the lieutenant. "As luck would have it, I was down with a fever in Brazos bottom, or I guess I should have had to *draw my bean* with the rest of 'em, poor fellows!"

Wheatley's allusion to "drawing his bean" I understood well enough All who have ever read the account of this ill-starred adventure will remember, that the Texans, goaded by ill treatment, rose upon their guard, disarmed, and conquered them! but in their subsequent attempt to escape, ill managed and ill guided, nearly all of them were recaptured, and *decimated*—each tenth man having been shot like a dog! The mode of choosing the victims was by lot, and the black and white beans of Mexico (*frijoles*) were made use of as the expositors of the fatal decrees of destiny. A number of the beans, corresponding to the number of the captives, was placed within an earthern *olla*—there being a black bean for every nine white ones. He who drew the

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black bean must die! During the drawing of this fearful lottery, there occurred incidents exhibiting character as heroic as has ever been recorded in story.

Read from an eye-witness:

"They all drew their beans with manly dignity and firmness. Some of lighter temper jested over the bloody tragedy. One would say: '*Boys! this beats raffling all to pieces!*' Another: '*Well, this is the tallest gambling-scrape I ever was in.*' Robert Beard, who lay upon the ground exceedingly ill, called his brother William, and said: 'Brother, if you draw a black bean, I'll take your place—I want to die!' The brother, with overwhelming anguish, replied: 'No, I will keep my own place; *I am stronger, and better able to die than you.*' Major Cocke, when he drew the fatal bean, held it up between his finger and thumb, and, with a smile of contempt, said: 'Boys! I told you so: I never failed in my life to draw a prize!' He then coolly added: 'They only rob me of forty years.' Henry Whaling, one of Cameron's best fighters, as he drew his black bean, said, in a joyous tone: 'Well, they don't make much out of me anyhow; I know I've killed twenty-five of them.' Then demanding his dinner in a firm voice, he added: 'They shall not cheat me out of it.' Saying this, he ate heartily, smoked a cigar, and in twenty minutes after, he had ceased to live! The Mexicans fired fifteen shots at Whaling before he expired! Young Torrey, quite a youth, but in spirit a giant, said that he 'was perfectly willing to meet his fate—for the glory of his country he had fought, and for her glory he was willing to die.' Edward Este spoke of his death with the coolest indifference. Cash said: 'Well, they murdered my brother with Colonel Tannin, and they are about to murder me.' J. L. Jones said to the interpreter: 'Tell the officer to look upon men who are not afraid to die for their country.' Captain Eastland behaved with the most patriotic dignity; he desired that his country should not particularly avenge his death. Major Dunham said he was pro

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pared to die for his country. James Ogden, with his usua equanimity of temper, smiled at his fate and said: 'I am prepared to meet it.' Young Robert W. Harris behaved in the most unflinching manner, and called upon his companions to avenge their murder. * * * *

"They were bound together—their eyes being bandaged—and set upon a log near the wall, with their backs towards their executioners. They all begged the officer to shoot them in front, and at a short distance, saying, they '*were not afraid to look death in the face.*' This request the Mexican refused; and to make his cruelty as refined as possible, caused the fire to be delivered from a distance, and to be continued for ten or twelve minutes, lacerating and mangling those heroes in a manner too horrible for description."

When you talk of Thermopylæ, think also of Texas!

"But what of Holingsworth?" I asked.

"Ah! Holingsworth!" replied the lieutenant; "*he has* good cause to remember Ijurra, now I think of it. I shall give the story to you as I heard it;" and my companion proceeded with a relation, which caused the blood to curdle in my veins, as I listened. It fully explained, if it did not palliate, the fierce hatred of the Tennessean towards Rafael Ijurra.

In the Mier expedition, Holingsworth had a brother, who, like himself, was made prisoner. He was a delicate youth, and could ill endure the hardships, much less the barbarous treatment to which the prisoners were exposed during that memorable march. He became reduced to a skeleton, and worse than that, footsore, so that he could no longer endure the pain of his feet and ankles, worn skinless, and charged with the spines of acacias, cactus, and the numerous thorny plants in which the dry soil of Mexico is so prolific. In agony, he fell down upon the road.

Ijurra was in command of the guard; from him Holingsworth's brother begged to be allowed the use of a mule The

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youth had known Ijurra at San Antonio, and had even lent him money, which was never returned.

"To your feet, and forward!" was Ijurra's answer.

"I cannot move a step," said the youth, despairingly

"Cannot! *Carrai!* we shall see whether you can Here, Pablo," continued he, addressing himself to one of the soldiers f the guard; "give this fellow the spur; he is restive!"

The ruffian soldier approached with fixed bayonet, seriously intending to use its point on the poor way-worn invalid! The latter rose with an effort, and made a desperate attempt to keep on; but his resolution again failed him. He could not endure the agonizing pain, and after staggering a pace or two, he fell up against a rock.

"I cannot!" he again cried—"I cannot march further: let me die here."

"Forward! or you *shall* die here," shouted Ijurra, drawing a pistol from his belt, and cocking it, evidently with the determination to carry out his threat. "Forward!"

"I cannot," faintly replied the youth.

"Forward, or I fire!"

"Fire!" cried the young man, throwing open the flaps of his hunting-shirt, and making one last effort to stand erect.

"You are scarce worth a bullet," said the monster, with a sneer; at the same instant he levelled his pistol at the breast of his victim, and fired! When the smoke was blown aside, the body of young Holingsworth was seen lying at the base of the rock, doubled up, dead! A thrill of horror ran through the line of captives. Even their habitually brutal guards were touched by such wanton barbarity. The brother of the youth was not six yards from the spot, tightly bound, and witness of he whole scene! Fancy his feelings at that moment!

"No wonder," continued the Texan—"no wonder that Harding Holingsworth don't stand upon ceremony as to where and when he may attack Rafael Ijurra. I verily believe that the ...

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sence of the commander-in-chief wouldn't restrain him from taking vengeance. It ain't to be wondered at!"

In hopes that my companion might help me to come to some knowledge of the family at the hacienda, I guided the conversation in that direction.

"And Don Ramon de Vargas is Ijurra's uncle?"

"Sure enough, he must be. Ha! I did not think of that Don Ramon *is* the uncle. I ought to have known him this morning—that confounded *mezcal* I drank knocked him out of my mind altogether. I have seen the old fellow several times He used to come to San Antonio once a year, on business with the merchants there. I remember, too, he once brought a daughter with him—splendid girl that, and no mistake! Faith, she crazed half the young fellows in San Antonio, and there were no ends of duels about her. She used to ride wild horses, and fling the lazo like a Comanche. But what am I talking about? That mezcal *has* got into my brains, sure enough. It must have been *her* you chased? Sure as shootin', it was?"

"Probably enough," I replied, in a careless way. My companion little knew the deep, feverish interest his remarks were exciting, or the struggle it was costing me to conceal my emotions. One thing I longed to learn from him—whether any of these amorous duellists had been favoured with the approbation, of the lady. I longed to put this question, and yet the absolute dread of the answer restrained my tongue! I remained silent, till the opportunity had passed The hoof-strokes of half-a-dozen horses coming rapidly from the rear, interrupted the conversation. Without surprise, I saw that it was Holingsworth and the rangers who had been left at the hacienda.

"Captain Warfield!" said the Tennessean as he spurred alongside, "my conduct no doubt surprises you. I shall be able to explain it to *your* satisfaction when time permits. It's a long story—a painful one to me: you will not require it from me now. This much let me say—for good reason, I hold Rafael Ijurra

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as my most deadly foe. *I came to Mexico to kill that man;* and by the Eternal! if I don't succeed, I care not who kills *me!*"

"You have *not* then"———

With a feeling of relief, I put the question, for I read the answer in the look of disappointed vengeance that gleamed in the eyes of the Tennessean. I was not permitted to finish the interrogatory; he knew what I was going to ask, and interrupted me with the reply:

"No, no; the villain has escaped; but by"———

The rest of the emphatic vow was inaudible; but the wild glance that flashed from the speaker's eye expressed his deep purpose more plainly than words. The next moment he fell back to his place in the troop, and with his head slightly bent forward, rode on in silence. His dark taciturn features were lit up at intervals by an ominous gleam, showing that he still brooded over his unavenged wrong.

CHAPTER XII.

THE YELLOW DOMINO.

The next two days I passed in feverish restlessness. Holingsworth's conduct had quite disconcerted my plans. From the concluding sentences of Isolina's note, I had construed an invitation to revisit the hacienda in some more quiet guise than that of a filibustero; but after what had transpired, I could not muster courage to present myself under any pretence. It was not likely I should be welcome—I, the associate—nay, the commander—of the man who had attempted to take the life of a nephew, a cousin! Don Ramon had stipulated for a "little rudeness;" he had had the full measure of his bargain, and a good deal more.

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He could not otherwise than think so. Where I to present my self at the hacienda, I could not be else than coldly received—in short, unwelcome.

I thought of apologies and pretexts, but to no purpose. For two days I remained in vacillating indecision; I neither saw nor heard of her who engrossed my thoughts.

* * * * * * *

News from head-quarters! A "grand ball" to be given in the city!

This bit of gossip fell upon my ear without producing the slightest impression, for I cared little for dancing, and less for grand balls: in earlier youth I had liked both; but not then.

The thing would at once have passed from my thoughts, had it not been for some additional information imparted at the same time, which to me at once rendered the ball attractive.

The information I allude to was, that the ball was got up "by authority," and would be upon a grand scale. Its object was political; in other words, it was to be the means of cultivating a friendly intercourse between the conquerors and the conquered—a desirable end. Every effort would be made to bring out the "native society," and let it see that we Yankee officers were not such "barbarians" as they affected to deem, and in reality pronounced us. It was known—so stated my informant—that many families of the Ayankieados would be present; and in order to make it pleasanter for those who feared *proscription*, the ball was to be a masked one—*un baile de mascara.*

"The Ayankieados are to be there! and she"——

My heart bounded with new hope; and I resolved to make one of the maskers—not that I intended to go in *costume.* In my lender wardrobe was a civilian dress of proper cut, and tolerably well preserved: that would answer my purpose. The ball was to come off on the night following that on which I had word of it My suspense would be short.

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The time appeared long enough, but at length the hour arrived, and mounting my good steed, I started off for the city. A brisk ride of two hours brought me on the ground, and I found that I was late enough to be fashionable.

As I entered the ball-room, I saw that most of the company had arrived, and the floor was grouped with dancers. It was evident the affair was a "success." There were four or five hundred persons present, nearly half of them ladies. Many were in character costumes, as Tyrolese peasants, Andalusian *majas*, Bavarian broom-girls, Wallachian boyards, Turkish sultanas, and head-bedecked Indian belles. A greater number were disguised in the ungraceful domino, while not a few appeared in regular evening-dress. Most of the ladies wore masks; some simply hid their faces behind the coquettish *reboso tapado*, while others permitted their charms to be gazed upon. As the night wore on, and an occasional *copita de vino* strengthened the nerves of the company, the uncovered faces became more numerous, and masks got lost or put away.

As for the gentlemen, a number of them also wore masks—some were *en costume*, but uniforms predominated, stamping the ball with a military character. It was not a little singular to see a number of *Mexican* officers mingling in the throng! These were of course prisoners on *parole*; and their more brilliant uniforms, of French patterns, contrasted oddly with the plain blue dresses of their conquerors. The presence of these prisoners, in the full glitter of their gold-lace, was not exactly in good taste; but a moment's reflection convinced one it was not a matter of choice with them. Poor fellows! had they abided by the laws of etiquette, they could not have been there; and no doubt they were as desirous of shaking their legs in the dance as the gayest of their captors. Indeed, in this species of rivalry, they far outstripped the latter.

I spent but little time in observing these peculiarities; but one idea engrossed my mind, and that was to find Isolina de Vargas

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—no easy task amid such a multitude of maskers. Among the uncovered faces she was not. I soon scanned them all, or rather glanced at them. It needed no scanning to recognise hers. If there, she was one of the *mascaritas*, and I addressed myself to a close observation of the *dames en costume* and the dominoes Hopeless enough appeared the prospect of recognising her, but a little hope sustained me in the reflection, that, being myself uncovered, she might recognize *me*.

When a full half hour had passed away, and my lynx-like surveillance was still unrewarded, this hope died within me; and what may appear strange, I began to wish she was *not* there "If present," thought I, "she must have seen me ere this, and to have taken no notice"—— A little pang of chagrin accompanied this reflection.

I flung myself upon a seat, and endeavored to assume an air of indifference, though I was far from feeling indifferent, and my eyes as before kept eagerly scanning the fair maskers. Now and then, the *tournure* of an ankle—I had seen Isolina's—or the elliptical sweep of a fine figure, inspired me with fresh hope; but as the mascaritas who owed them were near enough to have seen, and yet took no notice of me, I conjectured—in fact, *hoped* —that none of them was she. Indeed, a well-turned ankle is no distinctive mark among the fair *doncellas* of Mexico.

At length, a pair of unusually neat ones, supporting a figure of such superb outlines, that even the ungraceful domino could not conceal them, came under my eyes, and riveted my attention. My heart beat wildly as I gazed. I could not help the belief that the lady in the yellow domino was Isolina de Vargas. She was waltzing with a young dragoon officer; and as they passed me, I rose from my seat, and approached the orbit of the dance in order to keep them under my eyes. As they passed me a second time, I fancied the lady regarded me through her mask: I fancied I saw her start. I was almost sure it was Isolina!

My feeling was now that of jealousy The young officer was

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one of th elegant gentlemen of the service—a professed lady killer—a fellow, who, notwithstanding his well-known deficiency of brains, was ever welcome among women. She seemed to press closely to him as they whirled around, while her head rested languishingly upon his shoulder. She appeared to be *contented* with her partner. I could scarcely endure the agony of my fancies.

It was a relief to me when the music ceased, and the waltz ended. The circle broke up, and the waltzers scattered in different directions, but my eyes followed only the dragoon officer and his partner. He conducted her to a seat, and then placing himself by her side, the two appeared to engage in an earnest and interesting conversation.

With me politeness was now out of the question. I had grown as jealous as a tiger; and I drew near enough to become a listener. The lowness of the tone in which they conversed precluded the possibility of hearing much of what was said, but I could make out that the spark was "coaxing" his partner to remove her mask. The voice that replied was surely Isolina's! I could myself have torn the silken screen from her face, through very vexation; but I was saved that indiscretion, for the request of her cavalier seemed to prevail, and the next instant the mask was removed by the lady's own hand. Shade of Erebus! what did I see? She was black—a *negress!* Not black as ebony, but nearly so; with thick lips, high cheek-bones, and a row of short "kinky" curls dangling over the arch of her glistening forehead!

My astonishment, though perhaps of a more agreeable kind, was not greater than that of the dragoon lieutenant, who, by the way, was also a full-blooded "Southerner." At sight of his partner's face he started, as if a six-pound shot had winded him; and after a few half-muttered excuses, he rose with an air of extreme *gaucherie*, and hurrying off, hid himself behind the crowd!

The "colored lady," mortified—as I presumed she must be—

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hastily readjusted her mask, and rising from her seat, glided away from the scene of her humiliation. I gazed after her with a mingled feeling of curiosity and pity; I saw her pass out of the door alone, evidently with the intention of leaving the ball. I fancied she had departed, as her domino, conspicuous by its bright yellow color, was no more seen among the maskers.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLUE DOMINO.

THUS disappointed, I gave up all hope of meeting her for whose sake I had come to the ball. She was either *not* there, or did not wish to be recognized, even by *me*. The latter supposition was the more bitter of the two; and goaded by it and one or two other uncongenial thoughts, I paid frequent visits to the "refreshment room," where wine flowed freely. A cup or two drove the *one idea* out of my mind; and after a while, I grew more companionable, and determined to enjoy myself like others around me. I had not danced as yet, but the wine soon got to my toes as well as into my head; and I resolved to put myself in motion with the first partner that offered.

I soon found one—a blue domino—that came right in my way, as if the fates had determined we should dance together. The lady was "*not* engaged for the next;" she would be "most happy."

This, by the way, was said in *French*, which would have taken me by surprise, had I not known that there were many French people living in C——, as in all the large cities of Mexico. They are usually jewellers, dentists, milliners, or other artizans of that class, who drive a lucrative trade among the luxury-loving *Mexicanas*. To know there were French people in the place, was to

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be certain you would find them at the ball; and there were they, numbers of them, pirouetting about, and comporting themselves with the gay *insouciance* characteristic of their nation. I was not surprised, then, when my blue domino addressed me in French.

"A French *modiste!*" conjectured I, as soon as she spoke.

Milliner or no, it mattered not to me; I wanted a dancing partner; and after another phrase or two in the same sweet tongue, away went she and I in the curving whirl of a waltz.

After sailing once round the room, I had two quite new and distinct impressions upon my mind: the first, that I had a partner *who could waltz*, a thing not to be met with every day. My blue domino seemed to have no feet under her, but floated around me as if borne upon the air! For the moment, I fancied myself in Ranelagh or Mabille! My other impression was, that my arm encircled as pretty a waist as ever was clasped by a lover. There was a pleasing rotundity about it, combined with a general symmetry of form and serpentine yieldiness of movement, that rendered dancing with such a partner both easy and delightful. My observation at the moment was, that if the face of the modiste bore any sort of proportion to her figure, she needed not have come so far from France to push her fortune.

With such a partner I could not otherwise than waltz well; and never better than upon that occasion. We were soon under the observation of the company, and became the cynosure of a circle. This I did not relish, and drawing my blue domino to one side, we waltzed towards a seat, into which I handed her with the usual polite expression of thanks.

This seat was in a little recess or blind window, where two persons might freely converse without fear of an eaves-dropper I had no desire to run away from a partner who danced so well, though she were a modiste. There was room for two upon the bench, and I asked permission to sit beside her.

"Oh, certainly," was the frank reply.

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"And will you permit me to remain with you till the music recommences?"

"If you desire it."

"And dance with you again?"

"With pleasure, monsieur, if it suit your convenience. But is there no other who claims you as a partner?—no other in this assemblage you would prefer?"

"Not one, I assure you. You are the only one present with whom I care to dance."

As I said this, I thought I perceived a slight movement, that indicated some emotion.

"It was a gallant speech, and the modiste is pleased with the compliment," thought I.

Her reply:

"It flatters me, sir, that you prefer my company to that of the many splendid beauties who are in this saloon; though it might gratify me still more *if you knew who I am.*"

The last clause was uttered with an emphasis, and followed by a sigh!

"Poor girl!" thought I, "she fancies that I mistake her for some grand dame—that if I knew her real position, her humble avocation, I should no longer care to dance with her. In that she is mistaken. I make no distinction between a milliner and a marchioness, especially in a ball-room. There, grace and beauty alone guide to preference."

After giving way to some such reflections, I replied:

"It is my regret, mam'selle, not to have the happiness of knowing you, and it is not possible I ever may, unless you will have the goodness to remove your mask."

"Ah! monsieur, what you ask is impossible."

"Impossible! and why, may I know?"

"Because, were you to see my face, I should not have you for my partner in the next dance; and to say the truth, I should regret that, since you waltz so admirably."

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"Oh! refusal and flattery in the same breath! No, mam'selle, I am sure *your* face will never be the means of your losing a partner. Come! let me beg of you to remove that envious counterfeit Let us converse freely face to face. *I* am not masked, as you see."

"In truth, sir, you have no reason to hide your face, which is more than I can say for many other men in this room."

"Quick-witted milliner," thought I, "Bravo, Ranelagh! Vive la Mabille!"

"Thanks, amiable masker!" I replied. "But you are too generous: you flatter me ——"

"It is worth while," rejoined she, interrupting me; "it improves your cheek: blushes become you, ha, ha, ha!"

"The deuce!" I ejaculated half aloud, "this *dame du Boulevard* is laughing at me!"

"But what *are* you?" she continued, suddenly changing her tone. "You are not a Mexican? Are you soldier or civilian?"

"What would you take me for?"

"A poet, from your pale face, but more from the manner in which I have heard you sigh."

"I have not sighed since we sat down."

"No—but before we sat down."

"What! in the dance?"

"No—before the dance."

"Ha! then you observed me before?"

"O yes; your plain dress rendered you conspicuous among so many uniforms; besides your manner ——"

"What manner?" I asked, with some degree of confusion, fearing that in my search after Isolina I had committed some stupid piece of left-handedness.

"Your abstraction; and, by the way, had you not a little *penchant* for a yellow domino?"

"A yellow domino?" repeated I, raising my hand to my

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head, as though it cost me an effort to rememember it—"a yellow domino?"

"Ay, ay—a ye-ll-ow dom-in-o," rejoined my companion with sarcastic emphasis—"a yellow domino, who waltzed with a young officer—not bad-looking, by the way."

"Ah! I think I *do* remember ——"

"Well, I think you *ought*," rejoined my tormentor, "and well too: you took sufficient pains to *observe*."

"Ah—aw—yes," stammered I.

"I thought you were conning verses to her, and as you had not the advantage of *seeing her face*, were making them to her feet!"

"Ha, ha!—what an idea of yours, mad'm'selle!"

"In the end, she was not ungenerous—she let you see the face?"

"The devil!" exclaimed I starting; "you saw the *dénouement* then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed she; "of course I saw the dénouement, ha, ha!—*drole*, wasn't it?"

"Very," replied I, not much relishing the joke, but endeavoring to join my companion in the laugh.

"How silly the spark looked? ha, ha!"

"Very silly indeed—ha, ha, ha!"

"And how disappointed ——"

"Eh?"

"How disappointed *you* looked, monsieur."

"Oh—ah—I—no—I assure you—I had no interest in the affair. I was not *disappointed*—at least not as you imagine."

"Ah!"

"The feeling uppermost in my mind was *pity*—pity for the poor girl."

"And you really *did* pity her?"

This question was put with an earnestness that sounded somewhat strange at the moment.

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"I really did. The creature seemed so mortified ——"

"She seemed mortified, did she?"

"Of course. She left the room immediately after, and has not returned since. No doubt she has gone home, poor devil!"

"Poor devil! Is that the extent of your pity?"

"Well, after all, it must be confessed she was a superb decep tion: a finer dancer I never saw—I beg pardon, I except my present partner—a good foot, an elegant figure, and then to turn out ——"

"What!"

"*Una negrilla!*"

"I fear, monsieur, you Americans are not very gallant towards the ladies of color. It is different here in Mexico, which you term *despotic.*"

I felt the rebuke.

"To change the subject," continued she; "are you *not* a poet?"

"I do not deserve the name of poet, yet I will not deny that I have made verses."

"I thought as much. What an instinct I have! O that I could prevail upon you to write some verses to me!"

"What! without knowing either your name or having looked upon your face. Mam'selle, I must at least see the features I am called upon to praise."

"Ah, monsieur, you little know: were I to unmask those features, I should stand but a poor chance of getting the verses. My plain face would counteract all your poetic inspirations."

"Shade of Lucretia! this is no needlewoman, though dealing in weapons quite as sharp. Modiste, indeed! I have been laboring under a mistake. This is some *dame spirituelle*, some grand lady."

I had now grown more than curious to look upon the face of my companion. Her conversation had won me: a woman who could talk so, I fancied, could not be ill-looking. Such an en-

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chanting spirit could not be hidden behind a plain face; besides, there was the gracefulness of form, the small gloved hand, the dainty foot and ankle demonstrated in the dance, a voice that rang like music, and the flash of a superb eye, which I could perceive even through the mask. Beyond a doubt, she was beautiful.

"Lady!" I said, speaking with more earnestness than ever, "I entreat you to unmask yourself. Were it not in a ball-room, I should beg the favor upon my knees."

"And were I to grant it, you could hardly rise soon enough, and pronounce your lukewarm leave-taking. Ha, monsieur! think of the yellow domino!"

"Mam'selle, you take pleasure in mortifying me. Do you deem me capable of such fickleness? Suppose for a moment you are not what the world calls beautiful, you could not by removing your mask, also strip yourself of the attractions of your conversation—of that voice that thrills through my heart—of that grace exhibited in your every movement! With such endowments, how could a woman appear ill-looking? If your face was even as black as hers of the yellow domino, I verily believe I could not perceive its darkness."

"Ha, ha, ha! take care what you say, monsieur. I presume you are not more indulgent than the rest of your sex; and well know I that, with you men, ugliness is the greatest crime of a woman."

"I am different, I swear ——"

"Do not perjure yourself, as you will if I but remove my mask I tell you, sir, that in spite of all the fine qualities you imagine me to possess, I am a vision that would horrify you to look upon."

"Impossible!—your form, your grace, your voice. Oh, unmask! I accept every consequence for the favor I ask."

"Then be it as you wish; but I shall not be the means of punishing you. Receive from your own hands the chastisement of your curiosity.'

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"You permit me, then? Thanks, mam'selle, thanks! It is fastened behind: yes, the knot is here—now I have it—so—so ——"

With trembling fingers, I undid the string, and pulled off the piece of taffety. Shade of Sheba! what did I see?"

The mask fell from my fingers, as though it had been iron at a cherry heat. Astonishment caused me to drop it; rather say horror—horror at beholding the face underneath—the *face of the yellow domino!* Yes, there was the same negress with her thick lips, high cheek-bones, and the little well-oiled kinks hanging like corkscrews over her temples!

I knew not either what to say or do; my gallantry was clean gone; and although I resumed my seat, I remained perfectly dumb. Had I looked in a mirror at that moment, I should certainly have beheld the face of a fool.

My companion, who seemed to have made up her mind to such a result, instead of being mortified, burst into a loud fit of laughter, at the same time crying out in a tone of raillery: "Now, Monsieur le Poète, does my face inspire you? When may I expect the verses? To-morrow? Soon? Never? Ah! monsieur, I fear you are not more gallant to us poor "ladies of color" than your countryman the lieutenant. Ha, ha, ha!"

I was too much ashamed of my own conduct, and too deeply wounded by her reproach, to make reply. Fortunately, her continued laughter offered me an opportunity to mutter some broken phrases, accompanied by very clumsy gestures, and thus take myself off. Certainly, in all my life, I never made a more awkward adieu. I walked, or rather *stole*, towards the entrance, determined to leave the ball-room, and gallop home. On reaching the door, my curiosity grew stronger than my shame! and I resolved to take a parting look at this singular Ethiopian. The blue domino, still within the niche, caught my eye at once; but on looking up to the face—gracious Heaven! *it was Isolina's!*

I stood as if turned into stone. My gaze was fixed upon her

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face, and I could not take it off. She was looking at me; but, oh! the expression with which those eyes regarded me! That was a glance to be remembered for life. She no longer laughed, but her proud lip seemed to curl with a sarcastic smile, as of scorn!

I hesitated whether to return and apologize. But no; it was too late. I could have fallen upon my knees, and begged forgiveness. It was too late. I should only subject myself to further ridicule from that capricious spirit.

Perhaps my look of remorse had more effect than words. I thought her expression changed; her glance became more tender, as if inviting me back! Perhaps ——

At this moment, a man approached, and, without much ceremony, seated himself by her side. His face was towards me—I recognized Ijurra!

They converse. Is it of *me*? Is it of ——? If so, he will laugh. A world to see that man laugh, and know it is at *me*. If he do, I shall soon cast off the load that is crushing my heart!

He laughs not—not even a smile is traceable on his sombre features. She has not told him, and well for him she has not. Prudence, perchance, restrains her tongue; she might guess the result.

They are on their feet again; she masks. Ijurra leads her to the dance; they front to each other; they whirl away—away: they are lost among the maskers!

* * * * * *

"Some wine, mozo!"

A deep long draught, a few seconds spent in buckling on my sword, a few more in reaching the gate, one spring, and my saddled steed was under me.

I rode with desperate heart and hot head; but the cool night-air, the motion of my horse, and his proud spirit, mingling with mine, gave me relief, and I felt calmer. On reaching the rancheria, I found my lieutenants still up, eating their rudely cooked

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supper. As my appetite was roused, I joined them at their meal; and their friendly converse restored for the time my spirit's equanimity.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE-THOUGHTS.

A DREAD feeling is jealousy, mortified vanity, or whatever you may designate the disappointment of love. I have experienced the sting of shame, the blight of broken fortune, the fear of death itself; yet none of these ever wrung my heart so rudely as the pang of an unreciprocated passion. The former are but transient trials, and their bitterness soon has an end. Jealousy, like the tooth of the serpent, leaves its poison in the sting, and long and slow is the healing of its wound. Well knew he this, that master of the human heart: Iago's prayer was not meant for mockery.

To drown my mortification, I had drunk wine freely at the ball; and on returning home, had continued my potations with the more fiery spirit of "Catalan." By this means I gained relief and sleep, but only of short duration. Long before day I was awake—awake to the double bitterness of jealousy and shame—awake to both mental and physical pain, for the fumes of the vile stuff I had drunk wracked my brain, as though they would burst open my skull. An ounce of opium would not have set me to sleep again, and I tossed in my couch like one laboring under delirium.

Of course the incidents of the preceeding night were uppermost in my mind. Every scene and action that had occurred, were as plainly before me, as if I was again witnessing them. Every effort to alienate my thoughts, and fix them upon some other theme, proved vain and idle; they ever returned to the

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same circle of reflections, in the centre of which was Isolina de Vargas! I thought of all that had passed, of all she had said I remembered every word. How bitterly I remembered that scornful laugh!—how bitterly that sarcastic smile, when the double mask was removed!

The very remembrance of her beauty pained me! It was now to me as to Tantalus the crystal waters, never to be tasted Before, I had formed hopes, had indulged in prospective dreams: the masquerade adventure had dissipated them. I no longer hoped, no longer permitted myself to dream of pleasant times to come: I felt that I was scorned.

This feeling produced a momentary revulsion in my thoughts. There were moments when I hated her, and vengeful impulses careered across my soul.

These were fleeting moments: again before me rose that lovely form, that proud grand spirit, in the full entirety of its power, and again my soul became absorbed in admiration, and yielded itself to its hopeless passion. It was far from being my first love, and, thus experienced, I could reason upon it. I felt certain it was to be the strongest and stormiest of my life.

I know of three loves distinct in kind and power. First, when the passion is reciprocated—when the heart of the beloved yields back thought for thought, and throb for throb, without one reserved pulsation. This is bliss upon earth—not always long-lived—ending perchance in a species of sublimated friendship. To have is no longer to desire.

The second is love entirely unrequited—love that never knew word or smile of encouragement, no soft whisper to fan it into flame, no ray of hope to feed upon. Such dies of inanition, the sooner that its object is out of the way, and absence will conquer it in time.

The third is the love that "dotes yet doubts," that doubts but never dies—no, never. The jealousy that pains, only sustains it; it lives on, now happy in the honeyed conviction of

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triumph, now smarting under real or fancied scorn—on, on, so long as its object is accessible to sight or hearing! No matter how worthless that object may be or become—no matter how lost or fallen: love regards not this. It has naught to do with the moral part of our nature. Beauty is the shrine of its worship, and beauty is not morality.

In my own mind, I am conscious of three elements or classes of feeling: the *moral*, the *intellectual*, and what I may term the *passional*—the last as distinct from either of the other two as oil from spirits or water. To the last belongs love, which I repeat again, has no sympathy with the moral feelings of our nature, but alas! as one might almost believe, with their opposite. Even a plain but wicked coquette will captivate more hearts than a beautiful saint, and the brilliant murderess, ere now, has made conquests at the very foot of the scaffold!

It pains me to pronounce these convictions, derived as they are from experience. There is as little gain as pleasure in so doing, but popularity must be sacrificed at the shrine of truth. For the sake of effect, I shall not play false with philosophy.

Rough ranger as I was, I had studied psychology sufficiently to understand these truths; and I endeavored to analyze my passion for this girl or woman—to discover *why* I loved her. Her physical beauty was of the highest order, and that no doubt was an element; but it was not all. Had I merely looked upon this beauty under ordinary circumstances—that is, without coming in contact with the spirit that animated it—I might have loved her, or I might not. It was the spirit, then, that had won me, though not alone. The same gem in a less brilliant setting might have failed to draw my admiration. I was the captive both of the spirit and the form. Soul and body had co-operated in producing my passion, and this may account for its suddenness and profundity. Why I loved her person, I knew—I was not ignorant of the laws of beauty—but why the spirit, I knew not. Certainly not from any idea I had formed of her high *mora*

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qualities; I had no evidence of these. Of her courage, even to daring, I had proof; of energy and determined will; of the power of thought, quick and versatile; but these are not *moral* qualities, they are not even *feminine*? True, she wept over her slain steed. Humanity! I have known a hardened *lorette* weep bitter tears for her tortoise-shell cat. She refused to take from me my horse. Generosity? She had a thousand within sight. Alas! in thus reviewing all that had passed between myself and the beautiful Isolina, in search of her moral qualities, I met with but little success!

Mystery of our nature! I loved her not the less! And yet my passion was pure, and I do not believe that my heart was wicked. Mystery of our nature! He who reads all hearts alone can solve thee!

I loved without reason; but I loved now without hope. Hope I had before that night. Her glance through the turrets—her note—its contents—a word or two at other times, had inspired me with hopes, however faint they were. The incident in the ball-room had crushed them.

Ijurra's dark face kept lowering before me; even in my visions he was always by her side. What was between the two? Perhaps a nearer relationship than that of cousin? Perhaps they were affianced? Married?

The thought maddened me.

I could rest upon my couch no longer. I rose and sought the open air; I climbed to the azotea, and paced it to and fro, as the tiger walks his cage. My thoughts were wild, and my movements without method. To add to the bitterness of my reflections, I now discovered that I had sustained a loss—not in property, but something that annoyed me still more. I had lost the order and its enclosure—the note of Don Ramon. I had dropped them on the day in which they were received, and I believed in the patio of the hacienda, where they must have been picked up at once. If by Don Ramon himself, then all was well;

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but if they had fallen into the hands of some of the leathern-clad herdsmen, ill affected to Don Ramon, it might be an awkward affair for that gentleman—indeed for myself. Such negligence would scarcely be overlooked at head-quarters; and I had ill-forebodings about the result. It was one of my soul's darkest hours.

From its very darkness I might have known that light was near, for the proverb is equally true in the moral as in the material world. Light *was* near.

CHAPTER XV

AN ODD EPISTLE.

BREAKFAST I hardly tasted. A *taso* of chocolate and a small sugared cake—the *desayuna* of every Mexican—were brought, and these served me for breakfast. A glass of cognac and a Havanna were more to the purpose, and helped to stay the wild trembling of my nerves. Fortunately, there was no duty to perform, else I could ill have attended to it. I remained on the azotea till near mid-day. The storm raging within prevented me from taking note of what was passing around. The scenes in the plaza, the rangers and their steeds, the "greasers" in their striped blankets, the *Indias* squatted on their *petates*, the pretty poblanas, were all unnoticed by me. At intervals, my eyes rested upon the walls of the distant dwelling; it was not so distant but that a human form could have been distinguished upon its roof, had one been there. There was none, and twenty, ay fifty times, did I turn away my disappointed gaze.

About noon, the sergeant of the guard reported that a Mexican wished to speak with me: mechanically, I gave orders for

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the man to be sent up; but it was not until he appeared before me that I thought of what I was doing.

The presence of the Mexican at once roused me from my unpleasant reverie. I recognised him as one of the vaqueros of Don Ramon de Vargas—the same I had seen on the plain during my first interview with Isolina.

There was something in his manner that betokened him a messenger. A folded note, which he drew from under his jerkin—after having glanced around to see whether he was noticed—confirmed my observation.

I took the note. There was no superscription, nor did I stay to look for one. My fingers trembled as I tore open the seal As my eye rested on the writing and recognised it, my heart throbbed so as almost to choke my utterance. I muttered some directions to the messenger; and to conceal my emotion from him, I turned away and proceeded to the furthest corner of the azotea before reading the note. I called back to the man to go below, and wait for an answer; and, then relieved of his presence, I read as follows:

"*July* 18—.

"*Gallant* capitan! allow me to bid you a *buenas dias*, for I presume that, after the fatigues of last night, it is but morning with you yet. Did you dream of your sable belle? 'Poor devil!' Ha, ha, ha! *Gallant* capitan!"

I was provoked at this mode of address, for the "gallant" was rendered emphatic by underlining. It was a letter to taunt me for my ill behaviour. I felt inclined to fling it down, but my eye wandering over the paper, caught some words that induced me to read on.

"*Gallant* capitan! I had a favorite mare. How fond I was of that creature you may understand, who are afflicted by a similar affection for the noble Moro. In an evil hour, your aim, too true alas! robbed me of my favorite, but you offered to

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repay me by *robbing* yourself, for well know I that the black is to you the *dearest object upon earth.* Indeed, were I the lady of your love, I should ill brook such a divided affection! Well, mio capitan, I understood the generous sacrifice you would have made, and forbade it; but I know you are desirous of cancelling your debt. It is in your power to do so. Listen!"

Some *hard* conditions I anticipated would follow; I recked not of that. There was no sacrifice I was not ready to make. I would have dared any deed, however wild, to have won that proud heart, to have inoculated it with the pain that was wringing my own. I read on:

"There is a horse, famed in these parts as the 'white Steed of the Prairies' (*el cavallo blanco de los llanos*). He is a wild horse, of course; snow-white in color, beautiful in form, swift as the swallow——. But why need I describe to you the 'white steed of the prairies?' you are a Tejano, and must have heard of him ere this? Well, mio capitan, I have long had a desire—a frantic one, let me add—to possess this horse. I have offered rewards to hunters—to our own vaqueros, for he sometimes appears upon our plains—but to no purpose. Not one of them can capture, though they have often seen and chased him. Some say that he *cannot be taken*, that he is so fleet as to gallop, or rather *glide* out of sight in a glance, and that, too, on the open prairie! There are those who assert that he is a phantom, *un demonio!* Surely so beautiful a creature cannot be the devil? Besides, I have always heard—and, if I recollect aright, some one said so last night—that the devil was *black.* 'Poor devil!' Ha, ha, ha!"

I rather welcomed this allusion to my misconduct of the preceding night, for I began to feel easier under the perception that the whole affair was thus treated in jest, instead of the anger and scorn I had anticipated. With pleasanter presentiments, I read on:

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"To the point, mio capitan. There are some incredulous people who believe the white steed of the prairies to be a myth, and deny his existence altogether. *Carrambo!* I know that he *does* exist, and, what is more to my present purpose, he is—or *was*, but two hours ago—within ten miles of where I am writing this note! One of our vaqueros saw him near the banks of a beautiful arroyo river, which I know to be his favorite ground. For reasons known to me, the vaquero did not either chase or molest him; but in breathless haste brought me the news.

"Now, capitan, gallant and grand! there is but one who can capture this famed horse, and that is your puissant self! Ah! *you have made captive what was once as wild and free.* Yes! *you* can do it—you and Moro!

"Bring me the white steed of the prairies! I shall cease to grieve for poor Lola. I shall forgive you that *contratiempo.* I shall forgive all—even your rudeness to my double mask. Ha ha, ha! Bring me the white steed! the white steed!

"ISOLINA."

As I finished reading this singular epistle, a thrill of pleasure ran through my veins. I dwelt not on the oddness of its contents, thoroughly characteristic of the writer. Its meaning was clear enough.

I *had* heard of the white horse of the prairies—what hunter or trapper, trader or traveller, throughout all the wild borders of prairie-land, has not? Many a romantic story of him had I listened to around the blazing camp-fire—many a tale of German-like *diablerie*, in which the white horse played hero. For nearly a century has he figured in the legends of the prairie "mariner"—a counterpart to the Flying Dutchman—the "phantom-ship" of the forecastle. Like this, too, ubiquitous—seen to-day scouring the sandy plains of the Platte, to-morrow bounding over the broad llanos of Texas, a thousand miles to the southward!

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That there existed a white stallion of great speed and splendid proportions—that there were twenty, perhaps a hundred such—among the countless herds of wild horses that roam over the great plains, I did not for a moment doubt. I myself had seen and chased more than one that might have been termed "a magnificent animal," and that no ordinary horse could overtake; but the one known as "the white steed of the prairies" had a peculiar marking, that distinguished him from all the rest—*his ears were black!*—only his ears, and these were of the deep color of ebony. The rest of his body, mane and tail, was white as fresh-fallen snow.

It was to this singular and mysterious animal that the letter pointed; it was the black-eared steed I was called upon to capture. The contents of the note were specific and plain. One expression alone puzzled me: "*You have made captive what was once as wild and free.*" What? I asked myself. I scarce dared to give credence to the answer that leaped liked an exulting echo from out my heart!

There was a postscript, of course; but this contained only "business." It gave minuter details as to when, how, and where the white horse had been seen, and stated that the bearer of the note—the vaquero who had seen him—would act as my guide.

I pondered not long upon the strange request. Its fulfilment promised to recover me the position, which but a moment before I had looked upon as lost for ever. I at once resolved upon the undertaking.

"Yes lovely Isolina! if horse and man can do it, ere another sun sets, you shall be mistress of the *white steed of the prairies!*"

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CHAPTER XVI

THE MANADA.

In half an hour after, with the vaquero for my guide, I rode quietly out of the rancheria. A dozen rangers followed close behind; and having crossed the river at a ford nearly opposite the village, we struck off into the *chapparal* on the opposite side.

The men whom I had chosen to accompany me were all old hunters, fellows who could "trail" and "crease" with accurate aim. I had confidence in their skill, and, aided by them, I had great hopes we should find the game we were in search of. My hopes, however, would not have been so sanguine but for another circumstance, it was this: Our guide had informed me, that when he saw the white steed, the latter was in company with a large drove of mares—a *manada*—doubtless his harem. He would not be likely to separate from them, and even if these had since left the ground, they could be the more easily "trailed," in consequence of their numbers. Indeed, but for this prospect, our wild-horse hunt would have partaken largely of the character of a "wild-goose chase." The steed, by all accounts of him, might have been seen upon one arroyo to-day, and by the banks of some other stream, a hundred miles off, on the morrow. The presence of his manada offered some guarantee, that he might still be near the ground where the vaquero had marked him. Once found, I trusted to the swiftness of my horse, and my own skill in the use of the lazo.

As we rode along, I revealed to my followers the purpose of the expedition. All of them knew the white steed by fame; one or two averred they had seen him in their prairie wander-

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ings. The whole party were delighted at the idea of such a "scout," and exhibited as much excitement as if I was leading them to a skirmish with guerilleros!

The country through which we passed was at first a dense chapparal, consisting of the various thorny shrubs and plants for which this part of Mexico is so celebrated. The greater proportion belonged to the family of *leguminosæ*—*robinias*, *gleditschias*, and the Texan acacias of more than one species, there known as *mezquite*. Aloes, too, formed part of the undergrowth, to the no small annoyance of the traveller—the wild species known as the *lechuguilla*, or pita-plant, whose core is cooked for food, whose fibrous leaves serve for the manufacture of thread, cordage, or cloth—while its sap yields by distillation the fiery *mezcal*. Here and there, a tree yucca grew by the way, its fascicles of rigid leaves reminding one of the plumed heads of Indian warriors. Some I saw with edible fruits growing in clusters, like bunches of bananas. Several species are there of these fruit-bearing yuccas in the region of the Rio Grande, as yet unknown to the scientific botanist. I observed also the *palmilla*, or soap-plant, another yucca, whose roots yield an excellent substitute for soap; and various forms of cactus—never out of sight on Mexican soil—grew thickly around, a characteristic feature of the landscape. Plants of humbler stature covered the surface, among which the syngenesists predominated; while the fetid *artemisia*, and the still more disagreeable odorous creosote plant (*Larrea Mexicana*), grew upon spots that were sandy and arid. Pleasanter objects to the eye were the scarlet panicles of the *Fouquiera splendens*, then undescribed by botanists, and yet to become a favorite of the arboretums. I was in no mood for botanising at the time, but I well remember how I admired this elegant species—its tall culm-like stems, surmounted by panicles of brilliant flowers, rising high above the level of the surrounding thicket, like banners above a host. Not that I possess the refined taste of a lover of flowers, and much

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less then; but cold must be the heart that could look upon the floral beauty of Mexico without remembering some portion of its charms. Even the *rudest* of my followers could not otherwise than admire; and once or twice, as we journeyed along, I could hear them give utterance to that fine epithet of the heart's desire "Beautiful!"

As we advanced, the aspect changed. The surface became freer of jungle; a succession of glade and thicket; in short, a "mesquite prairie." Still advancing, the "openings" became larger, while the timbered surface diminished in extent, and now and then the glades joined each other without interruption.

We had ridden nearly ten miles without drawing bridle, when our guide struck upon the trail of the manada. Several of the old hunters, without dismounting, pronounced the tracks to be those of wild *mares*, which they easily distinguished from *horse* tracks. Their judgment proved correct; for following the trail but a short distance further, we came full in sight of the drove, which the vaquero confidently pronounced was the manada we were in search of!

So far our success equalled our expectations; but to get sight of a *caballada* of wild horses, and to capture its swiftest steed, are two things of very unequal difficulty. This fact my anxiously beating heart and quickly throbbing pulse revealed to me at the moment. It would be difficult to describe the mingled feelings of anxious doubt and joyous hope that passed through my mind, as from afar off I gazed upon that shy herd, still unconscious of our approach.

The prairie upon which the mares were browsing was more than a mile in width, and, like those we had been passing through, it was surrounded by the low chapparal forest, although there were avenues that communicated with other openings of a similar kind. Near its centre was the manada. Some of the mares were quietly browsing upon the grass, while others were frisking and playing about, now rearing up as if in combat,

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now rushing in wild gallop, their tossed manes and full tails flung loosely upon the wind. Even in the distance we could trace the full rounded development of their bodies, and their smooth coats, glistening under the sun, denoted their fair condition. They were of all colors known to the horse for in this the race of the Spanish horse is somewhat peculiar. There were bays, and blacks, and whites—the last being most numerous. There were greys, both iron and roan, and duns with white manes and tails, and some of a mole color, and not a few of the kind known in Mexico as *pintados* (piebalds)—for spotted horses are not uncommon among the mustangs—all of course with full manes and tails, since the mutilating shears of the jockey had never curtailed their flowing glories.

But where was the lord of this splendid harem?—where the steed? This was the thought that was uppermost in the mind of all, the question upon every tongue. Our eyes wandered over the herd, now here, now there. White horses there were, numbers of them, but it needed but a glance to tell that the "steed of the prairies" was not there.

We eyed each other with looks of disappointment. Even my companions felt that; but a far more bitter feeling was growing upon me as I gazed upon the leaderless troop. Could I have captured and carried back the whole drove, the present would not have purchased one smile from Isolina. The steed was not among them!

He might still be in the neighborhood; or had he forsaken the manada altogether, and gone far away over the wide prairie in search of new conquests? The vaquero believed he was not far off. I had faith in this man's opinion, who, having passed his life in the observation of wild and half-wild horses, had a perfect knowledge of their habits. There was hope then. The steed might be near; perhaps lying down in the shade of the thicket; perhaps with a portion of the manada or some favorite in one of the adjacent glades. If so, our guide assured us we should

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soon have him in view. He would soon bring the steed upon the ground.

How? Simply by starting the mares, whose neigh of alarm would be heard from afar.

The plan seemed feasible enough; but it was advisable that we should surround the manada before attempting to disturb them, else they might gallop off in the opposite direction before any of us could get near. Without delay, we proceeded to effect the "surround."

The chapparal aided us by concealing our movements; and in half an hour we had deployed around the prairie.

The drove still browsed and played. They had no suspicion that a cordon of hunters was being formed around them, else they would have long since galloped away. Of all wild creatures, the shiest is the wild horse; the deer, the antelope, and buffalo are far less fearful of the approach of man. The mustang seems to understand the doom that awaits him in captivity. One could almost fancy that the runaways from the settlements—occasionally seen amongst them—had poured into their ears the tale of their hardship and long endurance.

I had myself ridden to the opposite side of the prairie, in order to be certain when the circle was complete. I was now alone, having dropped my companions at intervals along the margin of the timber. I had brought with me the bugle, with a note or two of which I intended to give the alarm to the mares. I had placed myself in a clump of mezquite trees, and was about raising the horn to my lips, when a shrill scream from behind caused me to bring down the instrument, and turn suddenly in my seat. For a moment, I was in doubt as to what could have produced such a singular utterance, when a second time it fell on my ear, and I then recognised it. It was the neigh of the prairie stallion!

Near me was a break in the thicket, a sort of avenue leading out into another prairie. In this I could hear the hoof-stroke

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of a horse going at a gallop. As fast as the underwood would allow, I pressed forward and came out upon the edge of the open ground; but the sun, low down, flashed in my eyes, and I could see no object distinctly. The tread of the hoofs and the shrill neighing still rang in my ears. Presently, the dazzling light no longer quite blinded me; I shaded my eyes with my hand, and could perceive the form of a noble steed stretching in full gallop down the avenue, and coming in the direction of the manada. Half-a-dozen springs brought him opposite; the beam was no longer in my eyes; and as he galloped past, I saw before me the "white steed of the prairies." There was no mistaking the marks of that splendid creature: there was the snow-white body, the ears of jetty blackness, the blue muzzle, the red, projecting nostril, the broad oval quarters, the rounded and symmetric limbs—all the points of an incomparable steed!

Like an arrow, he shot past. He did not arrest his pace for an instant, but galloped on in a direct line for the drove.

The mares had answered his first signal with a responsive neigh; and tossing up their heads the whole manada was instantly in motion. In a few seconds they stood at rest again, *formed in line*—as exact as could have been done by a troop of cavalry—and fronting their leader as he galloped up. Indeed, standing as they were, with their heads high in air, it was easy to fancy them mounted men in the array of battle; and often have the wild horses been mistaken for such by the prairie traveller!

Concealment or stratagem could no longer avail; the chase was fairly up. Speed and the lazo must now decide the result; and with this conviction, I gave Moro the spur, and bounded into the open plain. The neighing of the steed had signaled my companions, who shot almost simultaneously out of the timber, and spurred towards the drove, yelling as they came.

I had no eyes for aught but the white steed, and after him I directed myself. On nearing the line of mares, he halted in his wild gallop, twice reared his body upward, as if to reconnoitre

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the ground; and then, uttering another of his shrill screams, broke off in a direct line towards the edge of the prairie. A wide avenue leading out in that direction seemed to have guided his instincts. The manada followed, at first galloping in line; but this was soon broken, as the swifter individuals passed ahead of the others, and the drove became strung out upon the prairie.

Through the opening now swept the chase—the pursuers keenly plying the spur, the pursued straining every muscle to escape.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HUNT OF THE WILD HORSE.

My gallant horse soon gave proof of his superior qualities. One after another of my companions was passed; and as we cleared the avenue and entered a second prairie, I found myself mixing with the hindmost of the wild mares. Pretty creatures some of them were; and upon any other occasion, I should have been tempted to fling a lazo over one of them, which I might easily have done. Then I only thought of getting them out of the way, as they were hindering my onward gallop. Before we had quite crossed the second prairie, I had forged into the front rank, and the mares, seeing I had headed them, broke to the right and left, and scattered away. All were now behind me, all but the white steed; he alone kept the course, at intervals uttering the same shrill neigh, as if to tantalize and lure me on. He was yet far in advance, and apparently running *at his ease!*

The horse I bestrode needed neither spur nor guidance; he saw before him the object of the chase, and he divined the will of his rider. I felt him rising under me like a sea-wave. His hoofs struck the turf without impinging upon it. At each

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fresh spring, he came up with elastic rebound, while his flanks heaved with the conscious possession of power.

Before the second prairie was crossed, he had gained considerably upon the white steed; but to my chagrin, I now saw the latter dash right into the thicket.

I found a path, and followed. My ear served to guide me for the branches crackled as the wild horse broke through. Now and then I caught glimpses of his white body, glancing among the green leaves.

Apprehensive of losing him, I rode recklessly after, now breasting the thicket, now tracing its labyrinthine aisles. I heeded not the thorny mimosas; my horse heeded them not; but large trees of the false acacia (*robinia*) stood thickly in the way, and their horizontal branches hindered me. Often was I obliged to bend flat to the saddle, in order to pass under them. All this was in favor of the pursued, and against the pursuer.

I longed for the open prairie, and to my relief it at length appeared, not yet quite treeless, but studded with timber "islands." Amid these the white steed was sailing off; but in passing through the thicket, he had gained ground, and was now a long way in advance of me. He was making for the open plain that lay beyond, and this showed that it was his habit to trust to his heels for safety. Perhaps, with such a pursuer, he would have been safer to have kept the chapparal; but that remained to be seen.

In ten minutes' time, we had passed through the timber islands, and now the prairie—the grand, limitless prairie—stretched before us, far beyond the reach of vision.

On goes the chase over its grassy level—on till the trees are no longer behind us, and the eye sees nought but the green savannah, and the blue canopy arching over it—on, across the centre of that vast circle which has for its boundary the whole horizon!

The rangers, lost in the mazes of the chapparal, have long

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since fallen off; the mustangs have gone back; on all that wide plain, but two objects appear—the snow-white form of the flying steed, and the dark horseman that follows!

It is a long wild ride, a cruel gallop for my matchless Moro. Ten miles of the prairie have we passed—more than that—and as yet I have neither used whip nor spur. The brave steed needs no such prompting; he, too, has his interest in the chase—the ambition not to be outrun. My motive is different: I think only of the smiles of a woman; but such motives ere now has led to the loss of a crown or the conquest of a world. On, Moro! on! you must overtake him or die!

There is no longer an obstacle. He cannot hide from us here. The plain, with its sward of short grass, is level and smooth as the sleeping ocean; not an object intrudes upon the sight. He cannot conceal himself anywhere. There is still an hour of sunlight; he cannot hide from us in the darkness: ere that comes down, he shall be our captive. On, Moro! on!

On we glide in silence. The steed has ceased to utter his taunting neigh; he has lost confidence in his speed; he now runs in dread. Never before has he been so sorely pressed. He runs in silence, and so, too, his pursuer. Not a sound is heard but the stroke of the galloping hoofs—an impressive silence, that betokens the earnestness of the chase.

Less than two hundred yards separate us; I feel certain of victory. A touch of the spur would now bring Moro within range; it is time to put an end to this desperate ride. Now, brave Moro, another stretch, and you shall have rest!

I look to my lazo; it hangs coiled over the horn of my saddle: one end is fast to a ring and staple firmly riveted in the tree-wood. Is the loop clear and free. It is. The coil—is it straight? Yes; all as it should be.

I lift the coil, and rest it lightly over my bridle arm: I separate the noose, and hold it in my right hand. I am ready——! *God of Heaven! the steed?*

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It was a wild exclamation, but it was drawn from me by no common cause. In arranging my lazo, I had taken my eyes from the chase, only for a moment: when I looked out again, *the horse had disappeared!*

With a mechanical movement I drew bridle, almost wrenching my horse upon his haunches; indeed, the animal had half halted of his own accord, and with a low whimper seemed to express terror. What could it mean? Where was the wild horse?

I wheeled round, and round again, scanning the prairie on every side—though a single glance might have served. The plain, as already described, was level as a table; the horizon bounded the view: there was neither rock nor tree, nor bush nor weeds, nor even long grass. The sward was of the kind known upon the prairies as "buffalo-grass" (*Sesleria dactyloides*), short when full grown, but then rising scarcely two inches above the soil. A serpent could hardly have found concealment under it, but a horse —— Merciful heaven! *where was the steed?*

An indefinable feeling of awe crept over me: I trembled; I felt my horse trembling between my thighs. He was covered with foam and sweat; so was I—the effects of the hard ride: but the cold perspiration of terror was fast coming upon me The mystery was heavy and appalling!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PHANTOM HORSE.

I HAVE encountered dangers—not a few—but they were the ordinary perils of flood and field, and I understood them. I have had one limb broken, and its fellow bored with an ounce of lead. I have swam from a sinking ship, and have fallen upon the bat

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tle-field. I have looked at the muzzles of a hundred muskets aimed at my person, at less than thirty yards' distance, and felt the certainty of death; though the volley was fired, and I still live. Well, you will, no doubt, acknowledge these to be perils Do not mistake me; I am not boasting of having encountered them; I met them with more or less courage—some of them with fear; but if the fears inspired by all were combined into one emotion of terror, it would not equal in intensity that which I experienced at the moment I pulled up my horse upon the prairie.

I have never been given to superstition; perhaps my religion is not strong enough for that; but at that moment I could not help yielding to a full belief in the supernatural. There was no *natural* cause—I could think of none—that would account for the mysterious disappearance of the horse, I had often sneered at the credulous sailor and his phantom ship: had I lived to look upon a phenomenon equally strange, yet true—a phantom horse?

The hunters and trappers had, indeed, invested the white steed with this character; their stories recurred to my memory at the moment. I had used to smile at the simple credulity of the narrators I was now prepared to believe them. They were true!

Or was I dreaming? Was it not all a dream? The search for the white steed—the surround—the chase—the long, long gallop?

For some moments I actually fancied that such *might* be the case; but soon my consciousness became clear again; I was in the saddle, and my panting, smoking steed was under me. That was real and positive. I remembered all the incidents of the chase. They, too, were real, of a certainty; the white steed had been there: he was gone. The trappers spoke the truth. The horse was a phantom!

Oppressed with this thought, which had almost become a conviction, I sat in my saddle, bent and silent, my eyes turned upon

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the earth, but their gaze fixed upon vacuity. The lazo had dropped from my fingers, and the bridle reins trailed untouched over the withers of my horse.

* * * * * * *

My belief in the supernatural was of short duration; how long I know not, for, during its continuance, I remained in a state of bewilderment. My senses at length returned. My eyes had fallen upon a fresh hoof-print on the turf, directly in front of me. I knew it was that made by the white steed, and this awoke me to a process of reasoning. Had the horse been a phantom, he would not have made a track? I had never heard of the track of a ghost; though a *horse-ghost* might be different from the common kind!

My reflections on this head ended in the determination to follow the trail as far as it led; of course to the point where the steed must have mounted into the air, or evaporated—the scene of his apotheosis.

With this resolve, I gathered my reins, and rode forward upon the trail, keeping my eyes fixed upon the hoof-prints. The line was direct, and I had ridden nearly two hundred yards, when my horse came to a sudden stop. I looked out forward to discover the cause of his halting; with that glance, vanished my new-born superstitions.

At the distance of some thirty paces, a dark line was seen upon the prairie, running transversely to the course I was following. It appeared to be a narrow crack in the plain; but on spurring nearer, it proved to be a fissure of considerable width—one of those formations known throughout Spanish America as *barrancas*. The earth yawned, as though rent by an earthquake; but water had evidently something to do with its formation. It was of nearly equal width at top and bottom, and its bed was covered with a débris of rocks rounded by attrition. Its sides were perfectly vertical, and the stratification, even to the surface-turf, exactly corresponded—thus rendering it invisible at the

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distance of but a few paces from its brink. It appeared to shallow to the right, and no doubt ended not far off in that direction. Towards the left, on the contrary, I could see that it became deeper and wider. At the point where I had reached it, its bottom was nearly twenty feet from the surface of the prairie.

Of course, the disappearance of the white steed was no longer a mystery. He had made a fearful leap—nearly twenty feet sheer! There was the torn turf on the brink of the chasm, and the displacement of the loose stones, where he had bounded into its bed. He had gone to the left—down the barranca. The abrasion of his hoofs was visible upon the rocks.

I looked down the defile: he was not to be seen. The barranca turned off at an angle at no great distance. He had already passed round the angle, and was out of sight. It was clear that he had escaped; that to follow would be of no use; and with this reflection I abandoned all thoughts of carrying the chase further.

After giving way to a pang or two of disappointment, I began to think of the position in which I had placed myself. It is true I was now relieved from the feeling of awe that, but a moment before, had oppressed me; but my situation was far from being a pleasant one. I was at least thirty miles from the rancheria, and I could not tell in what direction it lay. The sun was setting, and therefore I had the points of the compass; but I had not the slightest idea whether we had ridden eastward or westward, after leaving the settlements. I might ride back on my own trail; *perhaps* I might: it was a doubtful point. Neither through the timber, nor on the open prairie, had the chase gone in a direct line. Moreover, I noticed in many places, as we glided swiftly along, that the turf was cut up by numerous hoof-tracks: droves of mustangs had passed over the ground. It would be no easy matter for me to retrace the windings of that long gallop.

One thing was evident; it would be useless for me to make

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the attempt before morning. There was not half an hour of sun left, and at night the trail could not be followed. I had no alternative but to remain where I was until another day broke.

But how remain? I was hungry; still worse, I was choking with thirst. Not a drop of water was near; I had seen none for twenty miles. The long hot ride had made me thirst to an unusual degree, and my poor horse was in a similar condition. The knowledge that no water was near, added, as it always does, to the agony, and rendered the physical want more difficult to be endured.

I scanned the bottom of the barranca, and tracked it with my eye as far as I could see: it was waterless as the plain itself. The rocks rested upon dry sand and gravel; not a drop of the wished-for element appeared within its bed, although it was evident that at some time a torrent must have swept along its channel.

After some reflection, it occurred to me that by following the barranca *downward*, I might find water; at least, this was the most likely direction in which to search for it. I rode forward, therefore, directing my horse along the edge of the chasm. The fissure deepened as I advanced, until, at the distance of a mile from where I first struck it, the gulf yawned full fifty feet into the plain, the sides still preserving their vertical steepness!

The sun had now gone down; the twilight promised to be a short one. I dared not traverse that plain in the darkness; I might ride over the precipitous edge of the barranca. Besides, it was not the only one: I saw there were others—smaller ones—the beds of tributary streams in times of rain. These branched off diagonally or at right angles, and were more or less deep and steep.

Night was fast closing over the prairie; I dared not ride further amid these perilous abysms. I must soon come to a halt, without finding water. I should have to spend the long hours without relief. The thought of such a night was fearful.

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I was still riding slowly onward, mechanically conducting my horse, when a bright object fell under my eyes, causing me to start in my saddle with an exclamation of joy. It was the gleam of water. I saw it in a westerly direction, the direction in which I was going. It was a small lake, or—in the phraseology of the country—a pond. It was not in the bottom of the ravine, where I had hitherto been looking for water, but up on the high prairie. There was no timber around it, no sedge; its shores were without vegetation of any kind, and its surface appeared to correspond with the level of the plain itself.

I rode forward with joyful anticipations, yet not without some anxiety Was it a *mirage?* It might be—often had I been deceived by such appearances. But no: it had not the filmy, gauze like halo that hangs over the mirage. Its outlines were sharply defined by the prairie turf, and the last lingering rays of the sun glistened upon its surface. It was water!

Fully assured of this, I rode forward at a more rapid rate.

I had got within two hundred paces of the spot, keeping my eyes fixed upon the glistening water, when all at once my horse started, and drew back! I looked ahead to discover the cause. The twilight had nearly passed, but in the obscurity I could still distinguish the surface of the prairie. The barranca again frowned before me, running transversely across my path. To my chagrin, I perceived that the chasm had made a sudden turn, and that the pond was on its *opposite side!*

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CHAPTER XIX.

A PRAIRIE DREAM.

THERE was no hope of crossing in the darkness. The barranca was here deeper than at any point above; so deep that I could but indistinctly see the rocky boulders at its bottom. Perhaps with the daylight I might be able to find a crossing-place; but from that doubtful hypothesis I derived little consolation.

It had now grown quite dark, and I had no choice but to pass the night where I was, though I anticipated a night of torture.

I dropped to the ground, and having led my horse a few rods unto the prairie, so as to keep him clear of the precipice, I relieved him of his saddle and bridle, and left him to browse to the full length of the lazo. For myself, I had but few preparations to make: there was no supper to be cooked, but eating was a matter of secondary importance on that occasion. I should have preferred a cup of water to a roast turkey.

I had but few implements to dispose of in my temporary camp. My rifle and hunting-knife, with horn and pouch, and the double-headed gourd, which served as water-canteen, and which, alas! had been emptied at an early hour of the day. Fortunately, my Mexican blanket was buckled on the croupe. This I unstrapped, and having enveloped myself in its ample folds, and placed my head in the hollow of my saddle, I composed myself as well as I could, in the hope of falling asleep.

For a long time this luxury was denied me. The torture of thirst will rob one of sleep as effectually as the stinging pain of toothache. I turned, and turned again, glaring at the moon;

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she was visible only at intervals, as black clouds were coursing across the canopy; but when she shone out, her light caused the little lake to glisten like a sheet of silver. Oh! how that bright water mocked me with its wavy ripple! I could comprehend the sufferings of Tantalus. I thought at the time that the gods could not have devised a more exquisite torture for the royal Lydian.

After some time, the pain of thirst was less intensely felt. Perhaps the cold damp air of night had the effect of relieving it; but it is more likely that fatigue and long endurance had rendered the sense less acute. Whatever may have been the cause, I suffered less, and felt myself yielding to sleep. There was no sound to keep me awake: perfect stillness reigned around; even the usual howling bark of the prairie wolf did not reach my ear. The place seemed too lonely for this almost ubiquitous night-prowler. The only sign of life that told me I was not alone was the occasional stroke of my steed's hoof upon the hard turf, and the "crop-crop" that told me he was busy with the short buffalo-grass. But these were soothing sounds, as they admonished me that my faithful companion was enjoying himself after his hard gallop, and strengthened my desire for repose.

I slept, but not lightly. No; my sleep was heavy, and full of troubled dreams. I have a sort of half belief that the *rôle* we play in these dream-scenes wear the body as much as if we enacted it in reality. I have often awaked from such visions feeble from fatigue. If such be the fact, during that night upon the prairie I went through the toils of the preceding day with considerable additions. First of all, I was in the presence of a lovely woman: she was dark-eyed, dark-haired—a brunette—a beauty. I traced the features of Isolina. I gazed in her eyes; I was happy in her smiles; I fancied I was beloved. Bright objects were around me. The whole scene was rose-color.

This was a short episode: it was interrupted. I heard shouts and savage yells. I looked out: the house was surrounded by

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Indians! They were already within the enclosure; and the moment after, crowds of them entered the house. There was much struggling and confusion. I battled with such arms as I could lay hold of; several fell before me; but one—a tall savage, the chief, as I thought—threw his arms around my mistress, and carried her away out of my sight.

I remember not how I got mounted; but I was upon horseback, and galloping over the wide prairie in pursuit of the ravisher. I could see the savage ahead upon a snow-white steed, with Isolina in his arms. I urged my horse with voice and spur, but, as I thought, for long, long hours in vain. The white steed still kept far in the advance; and I could come no nearer him. I thought the savage had changed his form. He was no longer an Indian chief, but the fiend himself: I saw the horns upon his head; his feet were cloven hoofs! I thought he was luring me to the brink of some fell precipice, and I had no longer the power to stay my horse. Ha! The demon and his phantom-horse have gone over the cliff! They have carried her along with them! I must follow—I cannot remain behind. I am on the brink. My steed springs over the chasm. I am falling—falling—falling!——

I reach the rocks at length. I am not killed: how strange I am not crushed! But no; I still live. Yet I suffer. Thirst chokes and tortures me: my heart and brain are aching, and my tongue is on fire The sound of water is in my ears: a torrent rushes by, near me. *If* I could only reach it, I might drink and live: but I cannot move; I am chained to the rocks. I grasp one after another, and endeavor to drag myself along: I partially succeed; but oh, what efforts I make. The labor exhausts my strength. I renew my exertions. I am gaining ground: rock after rock is passed. I have neared the rushing water; I feel its cold spray sprinkling me. I am saved!

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After such fashion ran my dream. It was the shadow of a

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reality, somewhat disorganized; but the most pleasant reality was that which awoke me. I found myself in the process of being sprinkled, not by the spray of a torrent, but by a plashing shower from the clouds! Under other circumstances, this might have been less welcome, but now I hailed it with a shout of joy The thunder was rolling almost continuously; lightning blazed at short intervals; and I could hear the roar of a torrent passing down the barranca.

To assuage thirst was my first thought; and for this purpose, I stretched out my concave palms, and held my mouth wide open, thus drinking from the very fountains of the sky. Though the drops fell thick and heavy, the process was too slow, and a better plan suggested itself. I knew that my *serapé* was waterproof: it was one of the best of Parras fabric, and had cost me an hundred silver dollars. This I spread to its full extent, pressing the central parts into a hollow of the prairie. In five minutes' time, I had forgotten what thirst was, and wondered how such a thing should have caused me so much torture!

Moro drank from the same "trough," and betook himself to the grass again. The under side of the blanket was still dry, and the patch of ground which it had sheltered. Along this I stretched myself, drew the serapé over me; and after listening a while to the loud lullaby of the thunder, fell fast asleep.

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CHAPTER XX.

LOST UPON THE PRAIRIE.

I slept sweetly and soundly. I had no dreams, or only such as were light, and forgotten with the return of consciousness.

It was late when I awoke. A bright sun was mounting into the blue and cloudless sky. This orb was already many degrees above the horizon.

Hunger was the father of my first thought. I had eaten nothing since an early hour of the preceding day, and then only the light *desayuna* of sweet-cake and chocolate. To one not accustomed to long fasting, a single day without food will give some idea of the pain of hunger; that pain will increase upon a second day, and by the third will have reached its maximum. Upon the fourth and fifth, the body grows weaker, and the brain becomes deranged; the nerve, however, is less acute, and though the suffering is still intense, hunger is never harder to endure than upon the second or third days. Of course, these remarks apply only to those not habituated to long fasts. I have known men who could endure hunger for six days, and feel less pain than others under a fast of twenty-four hours. Indians or prairie-hunters were those men, and fortunately for them that they are endowed with such powers of endurance, often driven as they are into circumstances of the most dire necessity. Truly "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb!"

As I have said, my first thought was of something to eat. I rose to my feet, and with my eye swept the prairie in every direction: no object, living or dead, greeted my sight; beast or bird there was none; my horse alone met my glance, quietly brows-

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ing on his trail-rope. I could not help envying him, as I scanned his well-filled sides. I thought of the bounty of the Creator in thus providing for his less intelligent creatures—giving them the power to live where man would starve. Who does not in this ecognize the hand of a Providence?

I walked forward to the edge of the barranca, and looked over. It was a grim abyss, over a hundred feet in depth, and about the same in width. Its sides were less precipitous at this point. The escarpment rocks had fallen in, and formed a sort of shelving bank, by which a man on foot might have descended into its bed, and climbed out on the opposite side; but it was not passable for a horse. Its cliffs were furrowed and uneven; rocks jutted out and hung over; and in the seams grew cactus plants, bramble, and small trees of dwarf cedar *(Juniperus prostrata.)*

I looked into its channel. I had heard the torrent rolling down in the night. I saw traces of the water among the rocks. A large body must have passed, and yet not a cupful could now have been lifted from its bed! What remained was fast filtering into the sand, or rising back to the heavens upon the heated atmosphere.

I had brought with me my rifle, in hopes of espying some living creature; but, after walking for a considerable distance along the edge, I abandoned the search. No trace of bird or quadruped could be found, and I turned and went back to the place where I had slept.

To draw the picket-pin of my horse and saddle him, was the work of a few minutes; this done, I began to bethink me of *where I was going*. Back to the rancheria, of course! That was the natural reply to such a question; but there was another far less easily answered: How was I to find the way? My design of the previous night—to follow back my own trail—was no longer practicable. *The rain had effaced the tracks!* I remembered that I had passed over wide stretches of light dusty soil,

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where the hoof scarcely impressed itself. I remembered that the rain had been of that character known as "planet showers," with large heavy drops, that, in such places, must have blotted out every trace of the trail. To follow the "back-track" was no longer possible. I had not before thought of this difficulty; and now, that it presented itself to my mind, it was accompanied by a new feeling of dread. I felt that *I was lost!*

As you sit in your easy-chair, you may fancy that this is a mere bagatelle—a little bewilderment that one may easily escape from who has a good horse between his thighs. It is only to strike boldly out and by riding on *in a straight line*, you must in time arrive *somewhere*. No doubt, that is your idea; but permit me to inform you that this depends very much upon circumstances. It would indeed be trusting to blind chance. You might arrive "somewhere," and that somewhere might be the very point from which you had started! Do you fancy you can ride ten miles in a direct line over a prairie, without a single object to guide you? Be undeceived, then; you cannot! The best mounted men have perished under such circumstances. It may take days to escape out of a fifty-mile prairie, and days bring death. Hunger and thirst soon gain strength and agony—the sooner that you know you have not the wherewith to satisfy the one, nor quench the other. Besides, there is in your very loneliness a feeling of bewilderment, painful to an extreme degree, and from which only the oldest prairie-men are free. Your senses lose half their power, energy is diminished, and your resolves become weak and vacillating. You feel doubtful at each step as to whether you be following the right path, and are ready at every moment to turn into another. Believe me, it is a fearful thing to be alone and lost upon the prairies!

I felt this keenly enough. I had been on the great plains before, but it was the first time I had the misfortune to wander astray on them, and I was the more terrified that I had already hungered to no common degree. There was something singular

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too, in the circumstances that had brought me into my present situation. The disappearance of the white steed, although accounted for by perfectly natural causes, had left upon my mind a strange impression. That he should have lured me so far, and then eluded me in such a way! I could not help fancying design in it; and fancying so, I could attribute such design only to a higher intelligence—in fact, to some supernatural cause! I was again on the edge of superstition. My mind began to give way and yield itself to hideous fancies.

I struggled against such thoughts, and succeeded in rousing myself to reflect upon some active measures for my safety. I saw that it was of no use to remain where I was. I knew that I could make a straight path for a couple of hours at least—the sun was in the sky, and that would guide me—until near the meridian hours. Then I should have to halt, and wait a while; for in that southern latitude, and just at that time of the year, the sun at noon is so near the zenith that a practised astronomer could not tell north from south. I reflected that before noon I might reach the timber, though that would not insure my safety Even the naked plain is not more bewildering than the openings of the mezquite groves and the chaparral that border it. Among these you may travel for days without getting twenty miles from your starting-point, and they are often as destitute of the means of life as the desert itself!

Such were my reflections as I had saddled and bridled my horse, and stood scanning the plain in order to make up my mind as to the direction I should take.

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CHAPTER XXI

A PRAIRIE REPAST.

In gazing out, my eye was attracted by some objects. They were animals, but of what species I could not tell. There are times upon the prairies when form and size present the most illusory aspects; a wolf seems as large as a horse; and a raven, sitting upon a swell of the plain, has been mistaken for a buffalo. A peculiar state of the atmosphere is the magnifying cause, and it is only the experienced eye of the trapper that can reduce the magnified proportions and distorted form to their proper size and shape.

The objects I had noticed were full three miles off; they were in the direction of the lake, and of course on the other side of the barranca. There were several forms—five I counted—moving phantom-like against the rim of the horizon. Something drew my attention from them for a short while—a period of perhaps three or four minutes' duration. When I looked out again, they were no longer to be seen; but by the edge of the pond, at less than five hundred yards' distance, five beautiful creatures were standing, which I knew to be antelopes. They were so close to the pond, that their graceful forms were shadowed in the water, and their erect attitudes told that they had just halted after a run. Their number corresponded with the objects I had seen but the moment before far out upon the prairie. I was convinced they were the same. The distance was nothing: these creatures travel with the speed of a swallow.

The sight of the prong-horns stimulated my hunger. My first thought was how to get near them. Curiosity had brought

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them to the pond; they had espied my horse and myself afar off, and had galloped up to reconnoitre us. But they still appeared shy and timid, and were evidently not inclined to approach nearer.

The barranca lay betweem them and me, but I saw that if I could entice them to its brink, they would be within range if my rifle.

Once more staking down my horse, I tried every plan I could think of. I laid myself along the grass upon my back, and kicked my heels in the air, but to no purpose: the game would not move from the water's edge.

Remembering that my serapé was of very brillant colors, I bethought me of another plan which, when adroitly practised, rarely fails of success. Taking the blanket, I lashed one edge to the ramrod of my rifle, having first passed the latter through the upper swivel of the piece. With the thumb of my left hand I was thus enabled to hold the rammer steady and transverse to the barrel. I now dropped upon my knees, holding the gun shoulder-high, and the gay-colored serapé spread out almost to its full extent, hung to the ground, and formed a complete cover for my person. Before making these arrangements, I had crept to the very edge of the barranca, in order to be as near as possible should the antelopes approach upon the opposite side. Of course every manœuvre was executed with all the silence and caution I could observe. I was in no reckless humor to frighten off the game. Hunger was my monitor. I knew that not my breakfast alone, but my life, might be depending on the successful issue of the experiment.

It was not long before I had the gratification of perceiving that my decoy was likely to prove attractive. The prong-horned antelope, like most animals of its kind, has one strongly developed propensity—that of *curiosity*. Although to a known enemy it is the most timid of creatures, yet in the presence of an object that is new to it, it appears to throw aside its timidity

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or rather its curiosity overcomes its sense of fear; and, impelled by the former, it will approach very near to any strange form, and regard it with an air of bewilderment. The prairie-wolf—a creature that surpasses even the fox in cunning—well knows this weakness of the antelope, and often takes advantage of it The wolf is less fleet than the antelope, and his pursuit of it in a direct manner would be vain; but with the astute creature, stratagem makes up for the absence of speed. Should a "band" of antelopes chance to be passing, the prairie-wolf lays himself flat upon the grass, clews his body into a round ball, and thus rolls himself over the ground, or goes through a series of contortions, all the while approaching nearer to his victims, until he has them within springing distance! Usually he is assisted in these manœuvres by several companions, for the prairie-wolf is social, and hunts in packs.

The square of bright colors soon produced its effect. The five prong-horns came trotting around the edge of the lake, halted, gazed upon it a moment, and then dashed off again to a greater distance. Soon, however, they turned and came running back, this time apparently with greater confidence, and a stronger feeling of curiosity. I could hear them uttering their quick "snorts" as they tossed up their tiny heads and snuffed the air. Fortunately, the wind was in my favor, blowing directly from the game, and towards me; otherwise, they would have "winded" me, and discovered the cheat, for they both know and fear the scent of the human hunter.

The band consisted of a young buck and four females—his wives; the nucleus, no doubt, of a much larger establishment in prospect—for the antelope is polygamous, and some of the older males have an extensive following. I knew the buck by his greater size and forking horns, which the does want. He appeared to direct the actions of the others, as they all stood in a line behind him, following and imitating his motions.

At the second approach, they came within a hundred yards

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of me. My rifle was equal to this range, and I prepared to fire. The leader was nearest me, and him I selected as the victim. Taking sight, I pulled trigger. As soon as the smoke cleared off, I had the satisfaction of seeing the buck down upon the prairie, in the act of giving his last kick. To my surprise none of the others had been frightened off by the report, but stood gazing at their fallen leader, apparently bewildered.

I bethought me of reloading; but I had incautiously risen to my feet, and so revealed my form to the eyes of the antelopes. This produced an effect which neither the crack of the rifle nor the fall of their comrade had done; and the now terrified animals wheeled about and sped away like the wind. In less than two minutes, they were beyond the reach of vision.

The next question that arose was how I was to get across the barranca. The tempting morsel lay upon the other side, and I therefore set about examining the chasm in order to find a practicable crossing. This I fortunately discovered. On both sides, the cliff was somewhat broken down, and might be scaled, though not without considerable difficulty.

After once more looking to the security of my horse's trail rope, I placed my rifle where I had slept, and set out to cross the barranca, taking only my knife. I could have no use for the gun, and it would hinder me in scaling the cliffs. I got to the bottom of the ravine, and commenced ascending on the opposite side where it was steeper; but I was assisted by the branches of the trailing cedar that grew among the rocks. I noticed, and with some surprise, that the path must have been used before, either by men or animals.

The soil that lay upon the ledges was "paddled" as by feet, and the rock in some places scratched and discoloured. These indications only caused me a momentary reflection. I was too hungry to dwell upon any thought but that of eating.

At length I reached the scarp of the cliff, and climbing out upon the prairie, soon stood over the carcass of the prong-horn.

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My knife was out, and next moment I was busy playing the part of butcher.

You will no doubt fancy that the next thing I did was to go in search of something to make a fire for the purpose of cooking. I did nothing of the sort; the next thing I did was to eat my breakfast. *I ate it raw;* and had you been in my situation, delicate as you are, you would have done the same.

It is true that, after I had satisfied the first cravings of appetite with the tongue of the antelope and a few morsels of steak, I became more fastidious, and thought a little roasting might improve the venison. For this purpose, I was about to return to the barranca, in order to gather some sticks of the cedar-wood, when my eyes fell upon an object that drove all thoughts of cookery out of my head, and sent a thrill of terror to my heart. The object in question was a large animal, which I at once recognized as the *grizzly bear*, the most dreaded of all creatures that inhabit the prairie.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHASED BY A "GRIZZLY."

The bear was one of the largest of his kind; but it was not his size that impressed me with fear, so much as the knowledge of his fierce nature. It was not the first time I had encountered the grizzly bear; and I knew his habits well. I was rather surprised at seeing one in that region. The range of this species is more to the west—among the defiles of the Rocky Mountains—but individuals occasionally wander as far east as the meridian of the Mississippi. The one before me was of a yellowish-red color, with legs and feet nearly black; but color is no character

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istic among these animals—scarce two of them being alike in this respect. I was familiar with the form and aspect, and could not be mistaken; I recognized the long shaggy pelage, the straight front, and broad facial disk, which distinguish this species from the *Ursus Americanus*. The yellow eyes, the huge teeth, but half-concealed by the lips, the long-curving claws—the most prominent marks of the *Ursus ferox*, as they are his most formidable means of attack—were all remembered.

When my eyes first rested upon this monster, he was just emerging out of the barranca at the very spot where I had climbed up myself! It was *his* tracks, then, I had observed, while scaling the cliff!

On reaching the level of the prairie, he advanced a pace or two, and then halting, reared himself up and stood upon his hind legs; at the same time, he uttered a snorting sound, which resembled the "blowing" of hogs when suddenly startled in the forest. For some moments he remained in this upright attitude, rubbing his head with his fore paws, and playing them about after the manner of monkeys. In fact, as he stood fronting me, he looked not unlike a gigantic ape!

When I say that I was terrified by the presence of this unwelcome intruder, I speak no more than truth. Had I been on horseback—on the back of Moro—I should have regarded the creature no more than the snail that crawled upon the grass The grizzly bear is too slow to overtake a horse; but I was *afoot*, and well knew that the animal could outrun *me*, however swift I deemed myself.

To suppose that he *would not attack me* would have been to suppose an improbability. I did not count upon such a thing; I knew too well the disposition of the enemy that approached I knew that in nine cases out of ten the grizzly bear is the assailant—that no animal in America will willingly risk a contest with him; and it is not certain that the lion of Africa would wear his laurels after an encounter with this fierce quadruped.

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Man himself shuns such an encounter, unless mounted upon the friendly horse; and even then, where the ground is not clear and open, the prudent trapper always gives "old Ephraim"—the prairie sobriquet of the grizzly—a wide berth, and rides on without molesting him. The white hunter reckons a grizzly bear equal in prowess to *two* Indians; while the Indian accounts the destruction of one of these animals a great feat in his life's history. Among Indian braves, a necklace of bear's claws is a badge of honor—since these adornments can only be worn by the man who has himself killed the animals from which they have been taken.

On the other hand, the grizzly bear fears no adversary; he assails the largest animals on sight. The elk, the moose, the bison, or wild horse, if caught, is instantly killed. With a blow of his paw, he can lay open the flesh, as if it had been gashed with an axe; and he can drag the body of a full-grown buffalo to any distance. He rushes upon man, whether mounted or afoot; and, ere now, a dozen hunters have retreated before his furious assault. A dozen bullets—ay, nearly twice that number—have been fired into the body of a grizzly bear without killing him; and only a shot through the brain or the heart will prove instantaneously mortal. Gifted with such tenacity of life and sanguinary fierceness of disposition, no wonder the grizzly bear is a dreaded creature. Were he possessed of the fleetness of the lion or tiger, he would be a more terrible assailant than either; and it is not too much to say that his haunts would be unapproachable by man. He is slow, however, compared with the horse: and there is another circumstance scarcely less favorable to those who pass through his district—he is not a *tree-climber*. Indeed, he does not affect the forest; but there is usually some timber in the neighborhood of his haunts; and many a life has been saved by his intended victim having taken refuge in a tree.

Well acquainted with these points in the natural history of the grizzly bear, and you may fancy the feelings I experienced as

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finding myself in the presence of one of the largest and fiercest, upon the naked plain alone, dismounted, almost unarmed! There was not a bush where I could hide myself, not a tree into which I might climb. There was no means of escape, and almost none of defence; the knife was the only weapon I had with me; my rifle I had left upon the other side of the barranca, and to reach it was out of the question. Even could I have got to the path that led down the cliff, it would have been madness to attempt crossing there; although not a tree-climber, the grizzly bear, by means of his great claws, could have scaled the cliff more expeditiously than I. I should have been caught before I could have reached the bottom of the ravine.

The bear was directly in the path. It would have been literally running "into his arms" to have gone that way!

These reflections occupy minutes of your time to *read;* I *thought* them in less than moments. A single glance around showed me the utter helplessness of my situation; I saw there was no alternative but a desperate conflict—a conflict with the knife!

Despair that for a moment had unnerved, now had the effect of bracing me; and, fronting my fierce foe, I stood ready to receive him.

I had heard of hunters having conquered and killed the grizzly bear with no other weapon than a knife, but after a terrible and protracted struggle—after many wounds and sore loss of blood. I had read in the book of a naturalist, that "a man might end a struggle with a bear in a few moments, if one hand be sufficiently at liberty to grasp the throat of the animal with the thumb and fingers externally, *just at the root of the tongue*, as a slight degree of compression there will generally suffice to produce a spasm of the glottis that will soon suffocate the bear beyond the power of offering resistance or doing injury!"

Beautiful theory! Sagacious naturalist! How would you like to try the experiment? Have you ever heard of birds being

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caught by the application of "salt to the tail?" The theory is as correct as yours, and I am certain the practice of it would be not more difficult!

But I digress among these after-thoughts. I had no time to reflect upon "compressions of the tongue" or "spasms of the glottis." My antagonist soon finished his reconnaissance of me and, dropping upon all-fours, he uttered a loud roar, and rushed towards me with open mouth.

I had resolved to await his attack; but as he came nearer, and I beheld his great gaunt form, his gleaming teeth, and his senna-colored eyes flashing like fire, I changed my design; a new thought came suddenly across my mind; I turned and fled.

The thought that prompted me to adopt this course was, that the bear might be attracted by the carcass of the antelope, and pause over it—perhaps long enough to give me a start, or enable me to escape altogether. If not, my situation could be no worse than it then was.

Alas! my hope was short-lived. On reaching the antelope, the fierce monster made no halt. I glanced back; he was already past it, and closing rapidly upon my heels!

I am a swift runner—one of the swiftest. Many a school-day triumph can I remember; but what was my speed against such a competitor! I was only running myself out of breath. I should be less prepared for the desperate conflict that must soon come off; better to turn, and at once face the foe!

I had half-resolved myself—half-turned, in fact—when an object flashed before my eyes that dazzled them. Inadvertently, I had run in the direction of the pond; I was now upon its shore It was the sun gleaming from the water that dazzled me. The surface was calm as a mirror.

A new idea—a sort of half-hope—rushed instantaneously into my mind. It was the straw to the drowning man. The fierce brute was close behind me; another instart, and we must have grappled.

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"Not yet, not yet," thought I, "I shall fight him in the wate —in the deep water. That may give me an advantage Per haps, there, the contest would be more equal; perhaps I may escape by diving!"

I sprang into the pond without a moment of hesitation. The water was knee-deep. I plunged onward, making for the centre; the spray rose around me; the pond deepened as I advanced; I was soon up to the waist.

I glanced around with anxious heart; the bear was standing upon the edge. To my surprise and joy, I saw that he had halted, and seemed disinclined to follow me?

I say, to my surprise I saw this, for I knew that water has no terrors for the grizzly bear; I knew that he could swim; I had seen many of his kind crossing deep lakes and rapid rivers. What, then, hindered him from following me?

I could not guess, nor, indeed, did I try to guess, at the moment; I thought of nothing but getting farther from the shore; and waded on till I had arrived near the centre of the lake, and stood neck deep in the water. I could go no farther without swimming, and therefore came to a stand, with my face turned towards my pursuer.

I watched his every movement. He had risen once more upon his hind-quarters, and stood looking after me, but still apparently without any intention of taking to the water!

After regarding me for some time, he fell back upon all fours, and commenced running around the border of the pond, as if searching for a place to enter.

There were not over two hundred paces between us, for the pond was only twice that in diameter. He could soon have reached me, had he felt so disposed; but for some reason or other, he seemed disinclined to a "swim."

For a full half hour he kept running back and forth along the shore. Besides the apprehension in which his presence held me, my situation was far from comfortable. Although there was a

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warm sun overhead, the water was as cold as ice, and my teeth began to chatter like castanets. I knew not how long the scene was to last. I well knew the vengeful disposition of the grizzly bear, and the untiring pertinacity with which he follows any one who may have roused his resentment. Fortunately, I had neither wounded nor molested him, and I was in hopes that my innocence in this respect might save me from a very protracted siege. I had no other hope of being rescued from my perilous situation.

He appeared to have made up his mind to wait until I should come out; though once or twice I thought he was about to swim towards me; for he halted upon the very edge, craned his head over the water, oscillating the fore part of his body, as if about to plunge in. After manœuvring in this way for some time, he turned away, and continued to pace along the bank What *he* thought of our relative situations, I cannot guess. A third party, who might have been spectator, would have regarded the tableau as comic in the extreme. Up to my neck in the middle of the pond, with only my head appearing above the water, I must have presented a ludicrous spectacle; and now that I think of it, I cannot help smiling at the figure I must have exhibited at that moment. I did not laugh at it then; I was too badly frightened for that. There was no laughter in me.

For a long while—nearly an hour, I should judge—the bear remained by the edge of the pond. Now and again, he made short excursions out into the prairie; but soon returned again, and regarded me afresh, as though determined not to lose sight of me for any length of time. I was in hopes that he might stray round to the other side of the pond, and give me the chance of making a rush for the ravine; but no; he continued on that side where he had first appeared, as though he suspected my design.

I began to despair. I shivered. The pond must have been a

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spring, so chill were its waters. I shivered, but kept my place: I dared not move out of it. I even feared to agitate the water around me, lest by so doing I might excite my fierce enemy, and tempt him to the onset. I shivered but stood still.

My patience was at length rewarded. The bear, making one of his short tours into the prairie, espied the carcass of the antelope. I saw that he had halted over something, though I could not tell what, for my eyes were below the level of the plain; presently, his head was raised again, and in his jaws were the remains of the prong-horn. To my joy, I now perceived that he was dragging it towards the barranca; and in another minute he had disappeared with it below the escarpment of the cliff.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TOUGHEST STRUGGLE OF MY LIFE.

I SWAM a few strokes, and then wading gently and without noise, I climbed out upon the sandy shore. With shivering frame and dripping garments, I stood, uncertain what course to pursue. I was upon the opposite side of the lake—I mean opposite to where I had entered it. I had chosen that side from precaution—lest the bear should suddenly return. He might deposit the carcass in his lair, and come back to look after me. It is a habit of these animals, when not pressed by immediate hunger, to bury their food or store it in their caves. Even the eating of the antelope would have been an affair of only a few minutes' time. The bear might still return, more fierce that he had tasted blood!

I was filled with irresolution. Should I fly off to the plain beyond the reach of pursuit? I should have to return again for

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of horse and rifle. To take to the prairie afoot would be like going to sea without a boat; but, even had I been sure of reaching the settlements in safety without my horse, I could not think of such a thing. I loved my Moro too well to leave him behind me: I would have risked life itself rather than part with that noble creature. No; the idea of deserting him was not entertained for a moment.

But how was I to join him? The only path by which I could cross the barranca, had just been taken by the bear. He was no doubt still upon it, in the bottom of the ravine. To attempt passing over, would be to bring myself once more under the eyes of the fierce brute; and I should certainly become his victim.

Another idea suggested itself—to go up the barranca, and find another crossing, or else head it altogether, and come down upon the opposite side. That was clearly the best plan.

I was about starting forward to execute it, when, to my dismay, I again beheld the bear; this time, not upon the same side with myself, but upon the opposite one, where Moro was picketed! He was slowly climbing out of the ravine, and when I first saw him, was dragging his huge body over the escarpment of the cliff. In a moment, he stood erect upon the open plain.

I was filled with a new consternation; I saw too surely that he was about to attack my horse!

The latter had already observed the bear's approach, and seemed to be fully aware of his danger. I had staked him at the distance of about four hundred yards from the barranca, and upon a lazo of about twenty in length. At sight of the bear, he had run out to the end of his trail-rope, and was snorting and plunging with affright.

This new dilemma arrested my steps and I stood with anxious feelings to watch the result. I had no hope of being able to yield the slightest aid to my poor horse—at least none occurred to me at the moment.

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The bear made directly towards him, and my heart throbbed wildly as I beheld the fierce monster almost within clawing distance. The horse sprang round, however, and galloped upon a circle of which the lazo was the radius. I knew, from the hard jerks he had already given to the rope, that there was no chance of its yielding and setting him free. No; it was a raw-hide lazo of the toughest thong. I knew its power, and I remembered how firmly I had driven home the picket-pin. This I had now cause to regret. What would not I have given to have drawn the blade of my knife across that rope!

I continued to watch the struggle with a painful feeling of suspense. The horse still kept out of reach by galloping around the circumference of the circle, while the bear made his attacks by crossing its chords or running in circles of lesser diameter. The whole scene bore a resemblance to an act at the Hippodrome, Moro being the steed, and the bear taking the part of the ring-master!

Once or twice, the rope circling round, and quite taut, caught upon the legs of the bear, and after carrying him along with it for some distance, flung him over upon his back. This seemed to add to his rage, and after rising each time, he ran after the horse with redoubled fury. I might have been amused at the singular spectacle, but my mind was too painfully agitated about the result.

The scene continued for some minutes without much change in the relative position of the actors. I began to hope that the bear might be baffled after all, and finding the horse too nimble for him, would give over his attempts, particularly as I had noticed the latter administer several kicks that might have discomfited any other assailant; but these only rendered the bear more savage and vengeful.

Just at this moment the scene assumed a new phase, likely to bring about the *dénoûment*. The rope had once more pressed against the bear; but this time, instead of trying to avoid it, he

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seized it in his teeth and paws. I thought at first he was going to cut it, and this was exactly what I wished for; but no—to my consternation I saw that he was crawling along it by constantly renewing his hold, and thus gradually and surely drawing nearer to his victim! The horse now screamed with terror!

I could bear the sight no longer. I remembered that I had left my rifle near the edge of the barranca, and some distance from the horse; I remembered, too, that after shooting the antelope, I had carefully reloaded it. I ran forward to the cliff, and dashed madly down its face; I climbed the opposite steep, and clutching the gun, rushed towards the scene of strife.

I was still in time; the bear had not yet reached his victim, though now within less than six feet of him.

I advanced within ten paces, and fired. As though my shot had cut the thong, it gave way at the moment; and the horse with a wild neigh sprang off into the prairie!

I had hit the bear, as afterwards ascertained, but not in a vital part, and my bullet had no more effect upon him than if it had been a drop of snipe-shot. It was the strength of despair that had broken the rope, and set free the steed.

It was my turn now; for the bear, as soon as he perceived that the horse had escaped him, rushed forward upon me, uttering as he did so a loud cry. I had no choice but fight. I had no time to reload. I struck the brute once with my clubbed rifle, and flinging the gun away, grasped the readier knife. With the strong keen blade—the knife was a bowie—I struck out before me; but the next moment I felt myself grappled and held fast. The sharp claws tore up my flesh; one paw was griped over my hips, another rested on my shoulder, while the white teeth gleamed before my eyes. My knife-arm was free—I had watched this when grappling—and with all the energy of despair, I plunged the keen blade between the ribs of my antagonist. I sought for the heart at every stab.

We rolled together to the ground, over and over again. The

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red blood covered us both. I saw it welling from the lips of the fierce monster, and I joyed to think that my knife reached his vitals I was wild—I was mad—I was burning with a fierce vengeance—with anger, such as one might feel for a human foe!

Over and over the ground in the fierce struggle of life and death. Again I felt the terrible claws, the tearing teeth; again went my blade up to the hilt.

O God! how many lives has he? Will he never yield to the red steel? See the blood!—rivers of blood—the prairie is red --we roll in blood. I am sick at the sight—sick—I faint. O Heavenly Father! * * * *

CHAPTER XXIV.

OLD COMRADES.

I FANCIED myself in a future world, battling with some fearful demon. No; those forms I see around me are of the earth. I still live!

My wounds pain me. Some one is binding them up. His hand is rude; but the tender expression of his eyes tells me that his heart is kind. Who is he? Whence came he?

I am still upon the wide prairie; I see that clear enough. Where is my terrible antagonist? I remember our fierce fight everything that occurred; but—*I thought he had killed me!*

I certainly *was dead.* But no; it cannot have been. I still live!

I see above me the blue sky, around me the green plain. Near me are forms—the forms of men, and yonder are horses!

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Into whose hands have I fallen? Whoever they be, they are friends; they must have rescued me from the gripe of the monster. But how? No one was in sight: how could they have arrived in time? I would ask, but have not strength to speak to them!

The men are still bending over me. I observe one with large beard, and brown bushy whiskers. There is another face, old and thin, and tanned to a copper color. My eyes wander from one to the other; some distant recollections stir within me. Those faces ——. Now I see them but dimly—I see them no longer —— * * * *

I had fainted, and was again insensible.

Once more I became conscious, and this time felt stronger. I could better understand what was passing around me. I observed that the sun was going down; but a buffalo robe, suspended upon two upright saplings, guarded his rays from the spot where I lay. My serapé was under me, and my head rested in my saddle, over which another robe had been laid. I lay upon my side, and the position gave me a commanding view of all that was passing. A fire was burning near, by which were two persons, one seated, the other standing; my eyes passed from one to the other, scanning each in turn.

The younger stood leaning on his rifle, looking into the fire. "He was the type of a 'mountain man'—a trapper. He was full six feet in his mocassins, and of a build that suggested the idea of strength and Saxon ancestry. His arms were like young oaks; and his hand grasping the muzzle of his gun appeared large, fleshless, and muscular. His cheek was broad and firm, and was partially covered with a bushy whisker, that met over the chin; while a beard of the same color—dull brown—fringed the lips. The eye was grey, or bluish gray, small, well set, and rarely wandering. The hair was light brown; and the complexion of the face, which had evidently once been blonde, was now nearly as dark as that of a half-breed. Sun-tan had produced

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this metamorphosis. The countenance was prepossessing: it might have been once handsome. Its expression was bold, but good-humored, and bespoke a kind and generous nature."

The dress of this individual was the well-known costume of his class--a hunting-shirt of dressed deerskin, smoked to the softness of a glove; leggings reaching to the hips, and fringed down the seams; mocassins of true Indian make, soled with buffalo hide *(parflèche.)* The hunting-shirt was belted around the waist, but open above, so as to leave the throat and part of the breast uncovered; but over the breast could be seen the under-shirt, of finer material—the dressed skin of the young antelope, or the fawn of the fallow deer. A short cape, part of the hunting-shirt, hung gracefully over the shoulders, ending in a deep fringe cut out of the buckskin itself. A similar fringe embellished the draping of the skirt. On the head was a raccoon cap—the face of the animal over the front, while the barred tail, like a plume, fell drooping over the left shoulder.

The accoutrements were a bullet-pouch, made from the undressed skin of a tiger-cat, ornamented with the head of the beautiful summer-duck. This hung under the right arm, suspended by a shoulder-strap; and attached in a similar manner was a huge crescent-shaped horn, upon which was carved many a strange souvenir. His arms consisted of a knife and pistol—both stuck in the waist-belt—and a long rifle, so straight that the line of the barrel seemed scarcely to deflect from that of the butt.

But little attention had been paid to ornament in either his dress, arms, or equipments; and yet there was a gracefulness in the hang of his tunic-like shirt, a stylishness about the fringing and bead-embroidery, and an air of jauntiness in the set of the 'coon-skin cap, that showed the wearer was not altogether unmindful of his personal appearance. A small pouch or case, ornamented with stained porcupine quills, hung down upon his breast. This was the pipe-holder—no doubt a *gage d'amour* from

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some dark-eyed, dark-skinned damsel, like himself a denizen of the wilderness.

His companion was very different in appearance; unlike him—in almost every respect unlike anybody I had ever seen, excepting himself.

The whole appearance of the individual was odd and striking. He was seated on the opposite side of the fire, with his face partially turned towards me, and his head sunk down between a pair of long lank thighs. He looked more like the stump of a tree dressed in dirt-colored buckskin than a human being; and had his arms not been in motion, he might have been mistaken for such an object. Both his arms and jaws were moving; the latter engaged in polishing a rib of meat which he had half roasted over the coals.

His dress—if dress it could be called—was simple as it was savage. It consisted of what might have once been a hunting-shirt, but which now looked more like a leathern bag with the bottom ripped open, and sleeves sewed into the sides. It was of a dirty brown color, wrinkled at the hollow of the arms, patched around the armpits, and greasy all over; it was fairly "caked" with dirt! There was no attempt at either ornament or fringe. There had been a cape, but this had evidently been drawn upon from time to time, for patches and other uses, until scarce a vestige of it remained. The leggings and moccasins were on a par with the shirt, and seemed to have been manufactured out of the same hide. They, too, were dirt-brown, patched, wrinkled, and greasy. They did not meet each other, but left a piece of ankle bare, and that also was dirt-brown, like the buckskin. There was no undershirt, vest, or other garment to be seen, with the exception of a close-fitting cap, which had once been catskin; but the hair was all worn off it, leaving a greasy, leathery-looking surface, that corresponded well with the other parts of the dress. Cap, shirt, leggings, and moccasins, looked as if they had never been stripped off since the day they were first tried

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on, and that might have been many a year ago! The shirt was open, displaying the naked breast and throat, and these, as well as the face, hands, and ankles, had been tanned by the sun and smoked by the fire to the hue of rusty copper. The whole man clothes and all, looked as if he had been smoked on purpose!

His face bespoke a man of sixty, or thereabouts; his feature were sharp, and somewhat aquiline; and the small eyes were dark, quick, and piercing. His hair was black, and cut short; his complexion had been naturally brunette, though there was nothing of the Frenchman or Spaniard in his physiognomy. He was more likely of the black-Saxon breed.

As I looked at this man, I saw that there was a strangeness about him independent of the oddness of his attire. There was something peculiar about his head—something *wanting*.

What was it that was wanting? *It was his ears!*

There is something awful in a man without his ears. It suggests some horrid drama—some terrible scene of cruel vengeance: it suggests the idea of crime committed and punishment inflicted."

I might have had such painful imaginings, but that I chanced to know why those ears were wanting. I remembered the man who was sitting before me!

It seemed a dream, or rather the re-enactment of an old scene. Years before, I had seen that individual, and in a situation very similar. My eyes first rested upon him, seated as he was now, over a fire, roasting and eating. The attitude was the same; the *tout ensemble* in no respect different. There was the same greasy catskin cap, the same scant leggings, the same brown buckskin covering over the lanky frame. Perhaps neither shirt nor leggings had been taken off since I last saw them. They appeared no dirtier, however; that was not possible. Nor was it possible, having once looked upon the wearer, ever to forget him. I remembered him at a glance—Reuben *Rawling*, or "old Rube," as he was better known, one of the most celebrated of

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trappers. The younger man was "Bill Garey,' another mountain man," and old Rube's partner and constant companion.

My heart gladdened at the sight of these old acquaintances. I now knew I was with friends.

I was about to call out to them, when my eye wandering beyond rested upon the group of horses, and what I saw startled me from my recumbent position. There was Rube's old, blind, bare-ribbed, high-boned, long-eared mare-mustang. Her lank grizzled body, naked tail, and mulish look, I remembered well. There, too, was the large powerful horse of Garey, and my own steed Moro picketed beside them! This was a joyful surprise to me, as he had galloped off after his escape from the bear, and I had felt anxious about recovering him. But it was not the sight of Moro that caused me to start with astonishment; it was at the presence of another well-remembered animal—another horse. Was I mistaken? Was it an illusion? Were my eyes or my fancy again mocking me? No! It was a reality. There was the noble form, the graceful and symmetrical outlines, the smooth coat of silver white, the flowing tail, the upright jetty ears—all were before my eyes. It was he—*the white steed of the prairies!*

CHAPTER XXV.

A QUEER CONVERSATION.

The surprise, with the exertion I had made in raising myself, overcame me, and I fell back in a swoon It was but a momentary dizziness, and in a short while I was again conscious Meanwhile, the two men had approached, and having applied something cold to my temples, stood near me conversing! I heard every word.

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"Durn the weemen!" (I recognized Rube's voice); "thur allers a gittin a fellur into some scrape. Hyur's a putty pickle to be in, an all through a gurl. Durn the weemen! sez I."

"We-ell," drawlingly responded Garey, "pre-haps he loves the gal. They sez she's mighty hansum. Love's a strong feelin, Rube."

Although I had my eyes partially open, I could not see Rube, as he was standing behind the suspended robe; but a gurgling, clucking sound—somewhat like that made in pouring water from a bottle—reached my ears, and told me what effect Garey's remark had produced upon his companion.

"Cuss me, Bill!" the latter at length rejoined—"cuss me! ef yur ain't as durned a fool as the young fellur hisself! Love's a strong feelin! He, he, he—ho, ho, hoo! Wal, I guess it must a be to make sich dodrotted fools o' razeonable men. As yit, it ain't fooled this child, I reck'n."

"You never knewd what love wur, old hoss?"

"Thurr yur off o' the trail, Bill-ee. I *did* oncest—yis; oncest I wur in love, plum to the toe-nails. But thet wur a gurl to git sweet on. Ye-es, thet she wur, an no mistake!"

This speech ended in a sigh that sounded like the blowing of a buffalo.

"Who wur the gal?" inquired Garey, after a pause. "White or Injun?"

"Injun!" exclaimed Rube, in a contemptuous tone: "no: I reck'n not, boyee. I don't say thet, *for a wife*, an Injun ain't jest as good as a white, an more convaynient she are to git shet of when yur tired o' her. I've hed a good grist of squaws in my time—hef-a-dozen maybe, and maybe more. This I *kin* say, an no boastin neyther, thet I never sold a squaw yet for a plug o' bacca less than I gin for her; an on most o' 'em I made a clur profit. Thurfur, Billee, I don't object to an Injun for a wife: but *wives* is one thing, an *sweethearts* is diff'rent when it comes to thet. Now, the gurl I'm a-talkin 'bout wur my sweetheart."

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"She wur a white gal, then?"

"Are allyblaster white? She wur white as the bleached skull of a buffler; an sech har! 'Twur as red as the brush o' a kitfox. Eyes too! Ah, Billee, boy, them wur eyes to squint out o'! They wur as big as a buck's, an as soft as smoked fawn skin. I never seed a pair o' eyes like hern'!"

"What wur her name?"

"Her name wur Char'ty, an as near as I kin remember 'twur Holmes—Char'ty Holmes. Ye-es, thet wur the name. 'Twur upon Big-duck crick in the Tennessee bottom, the place whur this child chawed his fust hoe-cake. Let me see—it ur now more 'n thirty yeer ago. I fust met the gurl at a candy-pullin; an I recollex well we wur put to eat taffy agin one another. We ate till our lips met; an then the kissin—thet wur kissin, boyee. Char'ty's lips wur sweeter than the candy! We met oncest agin at a corn-shuckin, an arterwards at a blanket-trampin, an thur's whur the bisness wur done. I seed Char'ty's ankles as she wur a-trampin out the blankets, as white an smooth as peeled poplar. Arter thet turn, all up wi' Reuben Rawlings. I approached the gurl 'ithout more ado; an sez I: 'Char'ty,' sez I, 'I freeze to you;' an sez she: 'Reuben, I cottons to you.' So I immediantly made up to the ole squire—thet ur Squire Holmes—an axed him for his darter. Durn the ole skunk! he refused to gin her to me!

"Jest then, thur cum a pedlar from Kinneticut, all kivered wi' fine broadcloth. He made love to Char'ty; an wud yur believe it, Bill? the gurl married him! Cuss the weemen! thur all alike.

"I met the pedlar shortly arter, an gin *him* sech a larrupin as laid him up for a month; but I had to clur out for it, an I ther tuk to the plains. I never seed Char'ty arterward, but I heerd o' her oncest from a fellur I kim across on the Massoury. She wur a splendid critter; an if she ur still livin, she must hev a good grist o' young uns by this, for the fellur said she' hed twins

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shortly arter she wur married, with *har ane r jest like herself*. Wal, thur's no kalkalatin on weemen, anyhow. Just see wha this young fellur's got by tryin to sarve 'em. Wagh!"

Up to this moment I took no part in the conversation, nor had I indicated to either of the trappers that I was aware of their presence. Everything was enveloped in mystery. The presence of the white steed had sufficiently astonished me, and not less that of my old acquaintances, Rube and Garey. The whole scene was a puzzle; I was now equally at a loss to account for their being acquainted with the cause that had brought *me* there. That they were so, was evident from their conversation. Where could they have procured their information on this head? Neither of them had been at the rancheria, nor in the army anywhere; certainly not, else I should have heard of them. Indeed, either of them would have made himself known to me, as a strong friendship had formerly existed between us.

But they alone could give me an explanation, and, without further conjecture, I turned to them.

"Rube! Garey!" I said, holding out my hands.

"Hilloo! yur a-comin too, young fellur. Thet's right; but thur now—lay still a bit—don't worrit yurself; y'ul be stronger by 'm by."

"Take a sup o' this," said the other, with an air of rude kindness, at the same time holding out a small gourd, which I applied to my lips. It was *aguardiente* of El Paso, better known among the mountain-men as "Pass-whisky." The immediate effect of this strong, but not bad spirit, was to strengthen my nerves, and render me abler to converse.

"I see you recollects us, capt'n," said Garey, apparently pleased at the recognition.

"Well, old comrades—well do I remember you."

"We ain't forgot you neyther. Rube an I often talked about ye. We many a time wondered what hed becomed o' you. We heerd, of coorse, that you hed gone back to the settlements, as

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that you hed come into gobs o' property, an hed to change your name to git it"——

"Durn the name!" interrupted Rube. "I'd change mine ny day for a plug o' Jeemes River bacca; thet wud I sartint."

"No, capt'n," continued the younger trapper, without heeding Rube's interruption, "we hedn't forgot you, neyther of us."

"That we hedn't!" added Rube emphatically: "forgot ye—forgot the young fellur as tuk ole Rube for a grizzly! He, he, he!—ho, ho, hoo! How Bill hyur did larf when I gin him the account o' that bisness in the cave. Bill, boy, I niver seed you larf so in all my life. Ole Rube tuk for a grizzly! He, he, he!—ho, ho, hoo!"

And the old trapper went off into a fit of laughing that occupied nearly a minute. At the end of it, he continued:

"Thet wur a kewrious bit o' dodgin—wa'nt it, young fellur? You saved my ole karkidge thet time, an I ain't a-gwine to forgit it; no, this child ain't."

"I think you have repaid me; you have rescued me from the bear?"

"From *one* bar *pree*haps we did, but from t'other grizzly you rescooed yurself; an, young fellur, you must a fit a putty consid'able bout afore the varmint knocked under. The way you hev gin him the bowie ur a caution to snakes, I reck'n."

"What? were there two bears?"

"Look thur! thur's a kupple, ain't thur!"

The trapper pointed in the direction of the fire. Sure enough, the carcasses of *two* bears lay upon the ground, both skinned, and partially cut up!

"I fought with only one."

"An thet wur enuf at a time, an a leetle more, I reck'n. Tain't many as lives to wag thur jaws arter a stan-up tussle wi' a grizzly. Wagh! how you must have fit, to a rubbed out that bar!"

"I *killed* the bear, then?"

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"That you sartintly did, young fellur. When Bill an me kim on the groun, the bar wur as dead as pickled pork. We thort yur case wa'nt any better. Thur you lay a-huggin the bar, an the bar a-huggin you, as ef both on yur hed gone to sleep in a sort o' friendly way, like the babbies in the wood. But thur wur yur claret a kiverin the paraira for yurds round. Thur wa'nt as much blood in you as wud a-gin a leech his breakfist."

"The other bear?"

"She cum arterwards out o' the gully. Bill, he wur gone to look arter the white hoss I wur sittin by you, jest hyur, when I seed the varmint's snout pokin up. I know'd it wur the she bar a comin to see where ole Eph had strayed to. So I tuk up Targuts, and plummed the critter in the eye, and thet wur the end o' *her* trampin.

"Now, lookee hyur, young fellur! I ain't no doctur, neyther's Bill, but I knows enough about wownds to be sartint thet you must lay still, an stop talkin. Yur mighty bad scratched, I tell ye, but yur not dangerous, only you've got no blood in yur body, and you must wait till it gathers agin. Take another suck out o' the gourd. Thur now, come, Billee! leave 'im alone. Le's go an hev a fresh tooth-full o' bar-meat."

And so saying, the leathery figure moved off in the direction of the fire, followed by his younger companion.

Although I was anxious to have a further explanation about the other points that puzzled me—about the steed, the trappers' own presence, their knowledge of my wild hunt, and its antecedents—I knew it would be useless to question Old Rube any further, after what he had said; I was compelled, therefore, to follow his advice, and remain quiet.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

VOWS OF VENGEANCE.

I soon fell asleep again, and this time slept long and profoundly. It was after nightfall, in fact, near midnight, when I awoke. The air had grown chilly, but I found I had not been neglected; my serapé was wrapped closely around me, and with a buffalo-robe, had sufficiently protected me from the cold while I slept. On awaking, I felt much better and stronger. I looked around for my companions. The fire had gone out—no doubt intentionally extinguished, lest its glare amid the darkness might attract the eye of some roving Indian. The night was a clear one, though moonless; but the heaven was spangled with its sparkling worlds, and the starlight enabled me to make out the forms of the two trappers and the group of browsing horses. Of the former, one only was asleep; the other sat upright, keeping guard over the camp. He was motionless as a statue; but the small spark gleaming like a glowworm from the bowl of his tobacco-pipe, gave token of his wakefulness. Dim as the light was, I could distinguish the upright form to be that of the earless trapper. It was Garey who was sleeping.

I could have wished it otherwise. I was anxious to have some conversation with the younger of my companions; I was longing for an explanation, and I should have preferred addressing myself to Garey. My anxiety would not allow me to wait and I turned towards Rube. He sat near me, and I spoke in a low tone, so as not to awake the sleeper.

"How came you to find me?"

"By follerin your trail."

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"Oh, you followed me then! From the settlements?"

"Not so far. Bill an me wur camped in the chaparril, and spied you a gallupin arter the white hoss, as ef all the devils wur arter *you*. I knowed yur at a glimp; so d'd Bill. Sez I: 'Bill, thet ur the young fellur as tuk me for a grizzly up thur in the mountains,' an the reckolecshun o' the sark'mstance sot me a larfin till my ole ribs ached. 'It ur the same,' sez Bill. Jest then, we met a Mexikin who hed been yur guide, gallupin about in search o' you. He gin us a story 'bout some gurl thet hed sent you to catch the white hoss; some saynyora with a dodrotted long name. 'Durn the weemen!' sez I to Bill Didn't I, Bill?"

To this interesting interrogatory, Garey, who was but half asleep, gave an assenting grunt.

"Wall," continued Rube, "seein thur wur a pettycoat in the case, I sez to Bill, sez I: 'Thet young fellur ain't a-gwine to pull up till eyther he grups the hoss, or the hoss gits clur off.' Now, I knowd you wur well mounted, but I knowd you wur arter the fasted critter on all these parairas; so I sez to Bill, sez I: 'Billee, thur boun for a long gallup.' Sez Bill: 'Thet ur sartin.' Wal! Bill an me tuk the idee in our heads, thet you mout git lost, for we seed the white hoss wur a makin for the big paraira. It ain't the biggest paraira in creashun, but it ur one of the wust to git strayed on. Yur greenhorns wur all gone back, so Bill an me catched up our critters, an as soon as we kud saddle 'em put arter you. When we kumd out in the paraira, we seed no signs o' you, 'ceptin yur trail. Thet we follered up; but it wur night long afore we got half way hyur, an wur obleeged to halt till sunup.

"In the mornin', the trail wur purty blind, on account o the rain; an it tuk us a good spell afore we reached the gully. 'Thur,' sez Bill, 'the hoss hes jumped in an hyur's the trail o' the young feller leadin down the bank.' Wal, we wur jest turnin' to go down, when we seed yur own hoss a good

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ways off on the paraira, 'ithout saddle or bridle. We rid straight for him, an when we got closter, we seed somethin' on the groun' right under the hoss's nose. Thet somethin turned out to be yourself an the grizzly, lyin in grups, as quiet as a kupple o' 'sleepin'' possums. Yur hoss wur a squealin' like a bag o' wild-cats, an at fust Bill an me thort you hed gone under. But upon a closter view, we seed you wur only a faintin' while the bar wur as a dead as buck. Of coorse we sot about doctorin' you to fotch you roun' again."

"But the steed? the white steed?"

"Bill hyur grupped him in the gully. A leetle further down it's stopped up wi' big rocks. We knowd that, for we'd been hyer afore; we knowed the hoss kudn't a got over the rocks, an Bill went arter an foun' him, on a ledge whur he hed clomb out o' reach o' the flood; and then he lazooed the critter, and fotched 'im up hyur. Now, young fellur, you hev the hul story."

"An the hoss," added Garey, rising from his recumbent position, "he's yourn, capt'n. Ef you hadn't rid him down, I couldn't a roped him so easy. He's yourn, ef yu'll accept him."

"Thanks, thanks! not for the gift alone, but I may thank you for my life. But for you, I might never have left the spot. Thanks! old comrades, thanks!"

Every point was now cleared up. There was mystery no longer, though, from an expression which Garey had dropped, I still desired a word with him in private.

On further inquiry, I learned that the trappers were on their way to take part in the campaign. Some barbarous treatment they had experienced from Mexican soldiers at a frontier post, had rendered both of them inveterate foes to Mexico; and Rube declared he would never be contented until he had "plugged a score of the yellur-hided vamints." The breaking out of the war gave them the opportunity they desired, and they were now on their way, from a distant part of prairie-land to take a hand in it.

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The vehemence of their hostility towards the Mexicans somewhat surprised me—as I knew it was a recent feeling with them—and I inquired more particularly into the nature of the ill-treatment they had received. They answered me by giving a detailed account of the affair. It had occurred at one of the Mexican frontier towns, where, upon a slight pretext, the trappers had been arrested and flogged, by order of the commanding officer of the post.

"Yes-s!" said Rube, the words hissing angrily through his teeth; "yes-s, flogged!—a mountain-man flogged by a cussed monkey of a Mexikin! Ne'er a mind! ne'er a mind! By the 'tarnal!—an when I say thet, I swar it—this nigger don't leave Mexiko till he hes rubbed out a soger for every lash they gin him—an that's twenty!"

"Hyur's another, old hoss!" cried Garey, with equal earnestness of manner—"hyur's another that swars the same oath!"

"Yes, Billee, boy! I guess we'll count some in a skrimmage. Thur's two aready! lookee thur, young fellur!"

As Rube said this, he held his rifle close to my eyes, pointing with his finger to a particular part of the stock. I saw two small notches freshly cut in the wood. I knew well enough what these notches meant; they were a registry of the deaths of two Mexicans, who had fallen by the hand or bullet of the trapper. They had not been the only victims of that unerring and deadly weapon. On the same piece of wood-work I could see long rows of similar *souvenirs*, apart from each others, only differing a little in shape. I knew something of the signification of these horrible hieroglyphics; I knew they were the history of a life fearfully spent—a life of red realities.

The sight was far from pleasant. I turned my eyes away, and remained silent.

"Mark me, young fellur!" continued Rube, who noticed that I was not gratified by the inspection; "don't mistake Bill

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Garey an me for wild beests; we ain't thet quite: we've been mighty riled, I reck'n; but f'r all thet, we ain't a-gwine to take revenge on weemen an childer, as Injuns do. No—weemen an childer don't count, nor men neyther, unless thur sogers. We re no spite agin the poor slaves o' Mexiko. *They* never did me nor Bill harm We've been on one skurry, along wi' the Yutaws, down to the Del Nort settlements. Thur's whur I made them two nicks: but neyther Bill or me laid a finger on the weemin an childer. It wur bekase the Injuns *did*, thet we left 'em We're jest cum from thur. We want fair fight among Christyun whites; thet's why we're hyur. Now, young feller!"

I was glad to hear Rube talk in this manner, and I so signified to him. Indianised as the old trapper was, with all his savageness, all his reckless indifference to ordinary emotions, I knew there was still a touch of humanity in his breast. Indeed on more than one occasion, I had witnessed singular displays of fine feeling on the part of Rube. Circumstanced as he was, he is not to be judged by the laws of civilized life.

"Your intention, then, is to join some corps of rangers, is it not?" I asked, after a pause.

"I shed like it," replied Garey: "I shed like to join your company, capt'n; but Rube hyur won't consent to it."

"No!" exclaimed the other with emphasis; "I'll jine no kumpny. This niggur fights on his own hook. Yur see, young fellur, I hev been all my life a free mountainee-man, an don't understan sogerin, no how. I mout make some mistake, or I moutn't like some o' the regilashuns; thurfor I prefers fightin arter my own fashun. Bill an me kin take care o' ourselves, I reck'n. Kin we, Bill?—eh, boyee?"

"I guess so, old hoss," replied Garey, mildly; but for all that, Rube, I think it would be better to go at it in a regular way—particularly as the capt'n hyur would make the sogerin part as easy as possible. Wudn't yur, capt'n?"

"The discipline of my corps is not very severe. We are

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Rangers, and our duties are different from those of regular soldiers"——

"It ur no use," interrupted Rube; "I must fight as I've allers fit, free to kum an free to go whar I please. I won't bind myself. I moutn't like it, an mout desart"

"But by binding yourself," suggested I, "you draw pay an rations; whereas"——

"Darn pay an rashuns!" exclaimed the old trapper, striking the butt of his rifle upon the prairie. "Darn pay an rashuns! Young feller, *I fights fur revenge!*"

This was said in an energetic and conclusive manner, and I urged my advice no further.

"Look hyur, cap!" continued the speaker, in a more subdued tone. "Though I ain't a-gwine to jine yur fellurs, yet thur ur a favor I wud axe from yur, an thet is, to let me an Bill keep by you, or foller whuriver you lead. I don't want to spunge for rashuns; we'll git thet, ef thur's a head o' game in Mexiko, an ef thur ain't, why we *kin eat a Mexikan!* Can't we, Bill?—eh, boyee?"

Garey knew this was one of Rube's jokes, and laughingly assented; adding at the same time, that he would prefer eating any other "sort o' a varmint."

"Ne'er a mind!" continued Rube; "we ain't a-gwine to starve. So, young fellur, ef you agrees to our goin on them terms yu'll heve a kupple o' rifles near you, thet won't miss fire —*they* won't."

"Enough! You shall go and come as you please. I shall be glad to have you near me, without binding you to any term of service."

"Hooray! thet's the sort for us! Kum, Billee!—gie's another suck out o' yur gourd. Hyur's success to the Stars and Stripes! Hooray for Texas!"

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CHAPTER XXVII.

"WEED"-PRAIRIE ON FIRE.

My recovery was rapid. My wounds, though deep, were not dangerous; they were only flesh-wounds, and closed rapidly under the cauterising influence of the *lechuguilla*. Rude as my doctors were, in the matter of such a malady, I could not have fallen into better hands. Both, during their lives of accident and exposure, had ample practice in the healing art; and I would have trusted either, in the curing of a rattlesnake's bite, or the tear of a grizzly bear's claw, in preference to the most accomplished surgeon. Old Rube, in particular, thoroughly understood the simple pharmacopœia of the prairies; and his application to my wounds of the sap of the *pita* plant, obtained among the rocks of the ravine, bespoke his skill. This plant, a bromelia, is of the same genus as the *Agave Americana*, and by travellers often confounded with the latter, though quite a distinct plant from the *maguey* of cultivation. It grows in most parts of Mexico and South America, extending as far north as the latitude of 30°, and even further. There is no spot too arid or barren to give support to it. It is a true desert plant; and even on the naked rock, its curved and thorny blades may be seen radiating on all sides from the tall flower-stalk, that shoots upward like a signal-staff, to the height of twenty feet. As already observed, its uses are manifold: the fibre of its leaves can be manufactured into thread, cordage, and cloth; fences are constructed of the growing plant, and thatch of the blades when cut; its sap, distilled, furnishes the fiery but not unwholesome mezcal; and the large egg-shaped core or stem is eaten for food

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Tribes of Indians--Lipans, Comanches, and Apachés—use it extensively as an article of diet. One branch of the great Apaché nation are distinguished as "*Mezcaleros*" (eaters of the mezcal-plant.) They bake it in ground-ovens of heated stones, along with the flesh of the wild horse. It is firm when cooked, with a translucent appearance like candied fruits. I have eaten it; it is palatable—I might say delicious. The mastication of it is accompanied by a prickling sensation upon the tongue, singular to one unaccustomed to it. It is a gift of nature to the desert regions, where it grows in greatest luxuriance, and where it serves the same purpose in the economy of the savage natives as the *ixias*, *mesembryanthemums*, and *zamias* (the Caffre bread,) upon the arid karoos of Southern Africa.

One of the most esteemed qualities of this bromelia is the cauterizing property of its juice, well known to the natives of the Mexican table-land, and to the Peruvians, where several species are found of like virtues. It will cause ordinary wounds to cicatrise in a few hours, and even "ugly gashes" will yield to it in time.

My companions had full knowledge of its effects, and having extracted the sap from its large succulent leaves, and boiled it to the consistency of honey, they applied it to my wounds. This operation they from time to time repeated, and the scratches were healed in a period marvellously short. My strength, too, was soon restored. Garey with his gun catered for the cuisine, and the ruffed grouse, the prairie partridge, and roasted ribs of fresh venison, were dainties even to an invalid.

In three days I was strong enough to mount; and bidding adieu to our camping-ground, we set forth, taking with us our beautiful captive. He was still as wild as a deer; but we adopted precautions to prevent him from getting off. The trappers led him between them, secured to the saddles of both by a lazo.

We did not return in the direction of our old trail; my com

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panions know a shorter route, at least one upon which we should sooner reach water, and that is the most important consideration on a prairie journey. We headed in a more westerly direction; in which, by keeping in a straight line, we should strike the Rio Grande some distance above the rancheria.

The sky was leaden-grey, the sun not being visible, and with no guide in the heavens, we knew that we might easily diverge from a direct course. To provide against this, my companions had recourse to a compass of their own invention. On taking our departure from the camp, a sapling was stuck into the ground, and upon the top of this was adjusted a piece of bear's-skin, which, with the long hair upon it, could be distinguished at the distance of a mile or more. The direction having been determined upon, another wand, similarly garnished with a tuft of the bear's-skin, was set up several hundred yards distant from the first.

Turning our backs upon these signal-posts, we rode off with perfect confidence, glancing back at intervals to make sure we were keeping the track. So long as they remained in sight, and *aligned* with each other, we could not otherwise than travel in a straight path. It was an ingenious contrivance, but it was not the first time I had been witness to the "instincts" of my trapper-friends, and therefore I was not astonished

When the black tufts were well-nigh hidden from view, a similar pair—the materials for which had been brought along—were erected, and these insured our direction for another stretch of a mile; then fresh saplings were planted; and so on, till we had passed over some six miles of the plain.

We now came in sight of timber right ahead of us, and apparently about five miles distant. Towards this we directed our course.

We reached the timber about noon, and found it to consist o black-jack and post-oak groves, with mezquite and wild-chins

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trees interspersed, and here and there some taller trees of the honey locust (*Gleditschia triacanthos*).

It was not a close forest, but a succession of groves, with openings between—avenues and grassy glades. There were many pleasant spots, and, faint with the ride, I would fain have chosen one of them for a resting-place; but there was no water, and without water we could not halt. A short distance further, and we should reach a stream—a small *arroyo*, an affluent of the Rio Grande. So promised my companions, and we rode onward.

After passing a mile or so through the timber-openings, we came out on the edge of a prairie of considerable extent. It was full three miles in diameter, and differed altogether from the plain we had left behind us. It was of the kind known in hunter phraseology as a "weed-prairie," that is, instead of having a grassy turf, its surface was covered with a thick growth of flowering-plants, as *helianthus*, *malvas*, *altheas*, *hibiscus*, and other tall annuals standing side by side, and frequently laced together by wild-pea vines and various species of convolvulus. Such a flower-prairie was the one now before us, but not a flower was in sight; they had all bloomed, faded, and fallen, perhaps, unseen by human eye, and the withered stalks, burned by a hot sun, looked brown and forbidding. They cracked and broke at the slightest touch, shelling their seed-pods like rain upon the loose earth.

Instead of striking across this prairie, we skirted around its edge; and, at no great distance, arrived on the banks of the arroyo which ran along one side.

We had made but a short march; but my companions, fearful that a longer ride might bring on fever, proposed to encamp there for the night, and finish our journey on the following day. Though I felt strong enough to have gone further, I made no objection to the proposal; and our horses were at once unsaddled and picketed near the banks of the arroyo.

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The stream ran through a little bottom-valley covered with a sward of grass, and upon this we staked our steeds; but a better place offered for our camp upon the higher ground; and we chose a spot under the shade of a large locust-tree, upon the edge of the great wilderness of weeds. To this place we carried our saddles, bridles, and blankets, and having collected a quantity of dead branches, kindled our camp-fire. We had already quenched our thirst at the stream; but, although we were all three hungry enough, the dried flesh of the grizzly bear proved but a poor repast. The rivulet looked promising for fish. Garey carried both hooks and line in his "possible sack," and I proposed the angle.

The young trapper soon baited his hooks; and he and I, repairing to the stream, cast our lines, sat down, and waited for a nibble.

Fishing was not to Rube's taste. For a few minutes he stood watching us, but evidently with little interest, either in the sport or what it might produce. Rube was not a fish-eater.

"Durn yur fish!" exclaimed he at length; "I'd ruther hev a hunk o' deer-meat than all the fish in Texas. I'll jest see ef I kin scare up somethin'; the place looks likely for deer—it do."

So saying, the old trapper shouldered his long rifle, and stalking away, up the bank, was soon out of sight.

Garey and I continued bobbing with but indifferent success We had succeeded in drawing out a couple of cat-fish, not the most palatable of the finny tribe, when the crack of Rube's rifle sounded in our ears. It seemed to come from the weed-prairie, and we both ran up on the high bank to ascertain what success had attended the shot. Sure enough, Rube was out in the prairie, nearly half a mile distant from the camp His head and shoulders were just visible above the tall stalks of the helianthus; and we could see, by his stooping at intervals, that he was bending over some game he had killed, skinning or cut

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ting it up. The game we could not see, on account of the interposed stalks of the weeds.

"A deer, I reck'n," remarked Garey. "Buffler don't ofter o' late years stray so far to the suthert, though I've kilied some on the Grande, higher up."

Without other remark passing between us, we descended tc the arroyo, and continued our fishing. We took it for granted that Rube did not require any aid, or he would have signalled to us. He would soon return with his game to the camp.

We had just discovered that silver-fish (a species of *hyodon*) were plentiful in the stream, and this attracted us back. We were desirous of taking some of them for our dinner, knowing them to be excellent eating, and far superior to the despised "cat."

Having changed our bait for some small pieces of gold-lace, which my uniform furnished, we succeeded in pulling several of these beautiful creatures out of the water; and were congratulating one another upon the delicious broil we should have, when our conversation was suddenly interrupted by a crackling noise, that caused both of us to turn our faces towards the prairie. The sight that met our eyes prompted us to spring simultaneously to our feet. Our horses already reared upon their lazoes, neighing with affright, and the wild screams of Rube's mustang mare were loud and continuous. There was no mystery about the cause; that was obvious at a glance. The wind had blown some sparks among the dry flower-stalks. The prairie was on fire!

Though startled at the first sight of the conflagration, for our selves we had nothing to fear. The bottom on which we stood was a sward of short buffalo-grass; it was not likely to catch fire, and even if it did, we could easily escape from it. There is not much danger in a burning prairie where the grass is light and short; one can dash through the line of flame with no further injury than the singeing of his hair, or a little suffocation from

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smoke; but upon a plain covered with rank and thick vegeta tion, the case is very different. We therefore felt no apprehension for ourselves, but we did for our companion; *his* situation filled us with alarm.

Was he still where we had last seen him? This was the first question we asked one another. If so, then his peril was great indeed; escape would be almost hopeless! We had observed him a full half mile out among the weeds. He was on foot too To have attempted a retreat towards the opposite side of the prairie would have been folly: it was three miles off. Even on horseback, the flames would have overtaken him! Mounted, or on foot, he could not have got out of the way through those tall stalks—laced as they were by pea-vines and other trailing plants —whose tough tangle would have hindered the progress of the strongest horse!

To have returned to the near side would be his only chance; but that would be in the very face of the fire, and, unless he had started long before the flames broke out, it was evident that his retreat in that direction would be cut off. As already stated, the weeds were as dry as tinder; and the flames, impelled by gusts of wind, at intervals shot out their red tongues, licking up the withered stalks, coiling like serpents around them, and consuming them almost instantaneously.

Filled with forebodings, my companion and I rushed in the direction of the prairie.

When first noticed by us, the fire had extended but a few yards on each side of the locust-tree we had chosen for our camp We were not opposite this point at the moment, having gone a little way down the arroyo; we ran, therefore, not towards the camp, but for the nearest point of high ground, in order to discover the situation of our friend. On reaching the high ground, about two hundred yards from the locust, we saw, to our astonishment that the fire had already spread, and was now burning forward to the spot where we had climbed up! We

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had only a moment to glance outward, when the conflagration, hissing and crackling as it passed, rolled in front of us, and with its wall of flame shut off our view of the prairie.

But that glance had shown us all, and filled our hearts with sorrow and dismay; it revealed the situation of the trapper—no longer a situation of peril, but, as we supposed, of certain death! He was still in the place where we had last seen him; he had evidently made no attempt to escape from it. Perhaps the knowledge that such an attempt must have failed, had hindered him from making it. The reflection that he might as well die where he stood, as be licked up by the flames in the act of fleeing from them, had bound him to the spot!

Oh! it was a dread sight to see that old man, hardened sinner that he was, about to be snatched into eternity! I remember his wild look, as the red flame, rolling between us, shut him from our sight! We had seen him but for a single instant: his head and shoulders were alone visible above the tall weeds. He made no sign either with voice or arm; but I fancied that even at that distance I could read his glance of despair.

Was there no hope? Could no exertion be made to rescue him? Could he do nothing for himself? Was there no chance of his being able to clear a circle round him, and burn off a space before the line of fire could come up? Such a ruse has often availed, but no—never in such ground as that! The weeds were too thick and tall—it could not be done—Garey said it could not be done.

There was no hope, then. *The trapper was lost!*

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

RUBE ROASTED ALIVE.

DOOMED beyond doubt—doomed to quick, awful, and certain death was the earless trapper. In five minutes more he must perish. The wall of flame, moving faster than charging cavalry, would soon envelop him, and surer than the carbine's volley or the keen sabre-cut was the death borne forward by that hissing, crackling cohort of fire. Here and there, tall jets, shooting suddenly upward, stalked far in advance of the main line—fiery giants, with red arms stretched forth, as if eager to grasp their victim. Already their hot breath was upon him; another minute, and he must perish!

In a sort of stupor we stood, Garey and I, watching the advance of the flames. Neither of us uttered a word: painful emotions prevented speech. Both our hearts were beating audibly. Mine was bitterly wrung; but I knew that of my companion was enduring the very acme of anguish. I glanced upward to his face: his eye was fixed, and looked steadfastly in one direction—as though it would pierce the sheet of flame, that rolled further and further from where we stood, and nearer to the fatal spot The expression of that eye was fearful to behold; it was a look of concentrated agony. A single tear had escaped from it, and was rolling down the rude weather-bronzed cheek, little used to such bedewing. The broad chest was heaving in short quick spasm, and it was evident the man was struggling with his breath. He was listening through all this intensity of gaze—istening for the death-shriek of his old comrade—his bosom friand!

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Not long was the suspense; though there was no shriek, no cry of human voice, to indicate the crisis. If any arose, it was not heard by us. It could not have been; it would have been drowned amid the roar of the flames, and the crackling of the hollow culms, whose pent-up gases, set free by the fire, sounded like the continuous rolling of musketry. No death-cry fell upon our ears; but, for all that, we were satisfied that the drama had reached its dénouement; the unfortunate trapper was roasted alive!

Already the flames had passed over the spot where we had last seen him—far beyond—leaving the ground charred and black behind them. Though the smoke hindered our view of the plain, we knew that the climax had passed: the hapless victim had succumbed; and it remained only to look for his bones among the smouldering ashes.

Up to this moment, Garey had stood in a fixed attitude, silent and rigid as a statue. It was not hope that had held him thus spell-bound; he had entertained no such feeling from the first: it was rather a paralysis produced by despair. Now that the crisis was over, and he felt certain that his comrade had perished, his muscles, so long held in tension, suddenly relaxed—his arms fell loosely to his sides—the tears chased each other over his cheeks—his head reclined forward, and in a hoarse, husky voice he exclaimed:

"O! God o' mercy, he's rubbed out, rubbed out! We've seed the last o' poor Old Rube!"

My sorrow, though perhaps not so keen as that of my companion, was nevertheless sufficiently painful. I knew the earless trapper well—had been his associate under strange circumstances—amid scenes of danger that draw men's hearts more closely together than any phrases of flattery or compliment. More than once had I seen him tried in the hour of peril; and I knew that, notwithstanding the wildness and eccentricity of his character—of his crimes, I might add—his heart, ill directed by early edu

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cation, ill guided by after-association, was still rife with many virtues. Many proofs of this could I recall; and I confess that a feeling akin to friendship had grown up between myself and this singular man.

Between Garey and Rube the ties were still stronger. Long and inseparable companionship—years of participation in a life of hardships and perils—like thoughts and habitudes—though perhaps dispositions, age, and characters were a good deal unlike—all had combined to unite the two in a firm bond of friendship. To use their own expressive phrase, they "*froze*" to each other. No wonder then that the look, with which the young trapper regarded that black plain, was one of indescribable anguish.

To his mournful speech, I made no reply. What could I have said? I could not offer consolation. I was weeping as well as he: my silence was but an assent to his sad soliloquy:

After a moment, he continued, his voice still tremulous with sorrow: "Come, commarade! It are no use our cryin like a kupple o' squaws." With his large finger he dashed the tears aside, as if ashamed of having shed them. "It are all over now. Let's look arter his bones—that is, if thar's anything left o' 'em—and gie 'em Christyun burial. Come!"

We caught our horses, and mounting, rode off over the burn. ground. The hoofs of the animals tossed up the smouldering ashes, the hot red cinders causing them to prance. The smoke pained our eyes, and prevented us from seeing far ahead; but we guided ourselves, as well as we could, towards the point where we had last seen the trapper, and where we expected to find his remains.

On nearing the spot, our eyes fell upon a dark mass that lay upon the plain; it was much larger than the body of a man. We could not make out what it was, until within a few feet of it, and even then it was difficult to recognize it as the carcass of a buffalo—though such in reality it was. It was the game which

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the trapper had killed. It rested as it had fallen—as these animals usually fall—upon the breast, with legs widely spread, and humped shoulders upward. We could perceive that the unfortunate man had nearly finished skinning it—for the hide, parted along the spine, had been removed from the back and sides, and with the fleshy side turned outward, was hanging to the ground so as to conceal the lower half of the carcass. The whole surface was burnt to the color of charcoal.

But where were the remains of the hunter? They were nowhere to be seen near the spot. The smoke had cleared away sufficiently to enable us to observe the ground for several hundred yards around us. An object of small dimensions could have been distinguished upon the now bare surface; but none was seen. Yes! a mass lay beside the carcass, which drew our attention for a moment; but on riding up to it we perceived that it was the stomach and intestines of the buffalo, black and half broiled.

Where were the bones of Rube? Had he run away from the spot, and perished elsewhere?

We glanced towards the fire still raging on the distant plain. But no: it was not probable he had gone thence. By the last look we had obtained of him, it did not appear that he was making any effort to escape, and he could scarcely have gone a hundred yards before the flames swept over the spot. How then? Were his bones entirely consumed—calcined—reduced to ashes? The lean, withered, and dried-up body of the old mountain-man favored such a supposition; and we began seriously to entertain it—for in no other way could we account for the total absence of all remains!

For some moments we sat in our saddles under the influence of strange emotions, but without exchanging a word. We scanned the black surface round and round. The smoke no longer hindered our view of the ground. In the weed-prairies there is no grassy turf; and the dry herbaceous stems of the annuals had

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burned out, with the rapidity of blazing flax, so that nothing now remained to cause a smoke. The fire was red or dead in an instant. We could see clear enough all that lay over the ground, but nothing like the remains of a human being!

"No," said Garey, with a long-drawn sigh. "Poor Old Rube The cussed thing has burned him to ashes—bones an all! Thur ain't as much o' im left as 'ud fill a tabacca-pipe!"

"The h–ll thur ain't!" replied a voice that caused both of us to start in our saddles, as if it had been Rube's ghost that addressed us—"the h–ll thur ain't!" repeated the voice, as though it came out of the ground beneath our feet. "Thur's enough o' Ole Rube left to fill the stummuk o' this hyur buffler; an by the jumpin Geehosophat, a tight fit it ur! Wagh! I'm nigh suffocated! Gie's yur claws, Bill, an pull me out o' this hyur trap!"

To our astonishment the pendent hide of the buffalo was raised by an invisible hand; and underneath appeared, protruding through a hole in the side of the huge carcass, the unmistakable physiognomy of the earless trapper!

There was something so ludicrous in the apparition, that the sight of it, combined with the joyful reaction of our feelings, sent both Garey and myself into convulsions of laughter. The young trapper lay back in the saddle to give freer play to his lungs; and his loud cachinnations, varied at intervals by savage yells, caused our horses to dance about as if they dreaded an onslaught of Indians!

At first, I could detect a significant smile at the angles formed by Rube's thin lips; but this disappeared as the laughter continued too long for his patience.

"Cuss yur larfin!" cried he at length. "Kum, Billee, boy! Lay holt hyur, an gi' me a help, or I must wriggle out o' meeself. The durned hole ain't es big es twur when I krep in. Duru it, man, make haste! I'm better'n half-baked!"

Garey now leaped from his horse, and taking hold of his comrade by the "claws," drew him out of his singular hiding-place

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But the appearance of the old trapper, as he stood erect—red, reeking, and greasy—was so supremely ludicrous, that both Garey and I were forced into a fresh fit of laughter, which lasted for several minutes.

Rube, once released from his uncomfortable situation, paid not the slightest attention to our mirth; but stooping down, drew out his long rifle—from where he had secured it under the hanging skin—and after having examined the piece, to see that no harm had come to it, he laid it gently across the horns of the bull. Then taking the "bowie" from his belt, he quietly proceeded with the skinning of the buffalo, as if nothing had happened to interrupt the operation.

Meanwhile Garey and I had laughed ourselves hoarse, and, moreover, were brimful of curiosity to know the particulars of Rube's adventure. For some time he fought shy of our queries, and pretended to be "miffed" at the manner in which we had *welcomed him to life* again. It was all pretence, however, as Garey well knew; and the latter having thrust into his comrade's hand the gourd, still containing a small drop of *aguardiente*, soon conciliated him; and after a little more coaxing, he condescended to give us the details of his curious escapade. Thus ran his narration:

"Ee wur both o' yur mighty green to think thet arter fightin grizzly bar an Injun for nigh forty yeern on these hyur pararais, I wur a gwine to be rubbed out by a spunk o' fire like thet. Preehaps 'twur nat'ral enough for the young fellur hyur to take me for a *greenhorn*, seein as he oncest tuk me for a *grizzly*. He, he, he—ho, ho, hoo! I say it wur, an ur nat'ral enough for him to a thort so; but *you* might a knowd better—*you*, Bill Garey, seein as ee oughter knowd *me*.

"Wal!" continued Rube, after another "suck" at the gourd, "when I seed the weeds afire, I knowd it wa'nt no use makin tracks. Preehaps if I'd a spied the thing when the bleeze fust broke out, I mout a run for it, an mout a hed time; but I wur

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busy skinnin this hyar beest wi' my head clost down to the kar kidge, an thurfor didn't see nuthin till I heern the cracklin, an in coorse thur wa'nt the ghost o' a chance to git clur then. I seed thet at the fust glimp.

"I ain't a gwine to say I wa'nt skeart; I wur skeart, an bad skeart too I thort for a spell, I wur boun to *go under*. Jest then I sot my eyes upon the buffler. I hed got the critter 'bout half-skinned, as ee see; an the idee kim inter my head, I mout crawl somehow under, an pull the hide over me. I tried thet plan fust; but I kudn't git kivered to my saterfaction, an I gin it up. A better idee then kim uppermost, an thet wur to clur out the anymal's inside, an thur *caché*. I reck'n I wa'nt long in cuttin out a wheen o' the buffler's ribs, an tearin out the guts; an I wa'nt long neyther in squezzin my karkidge, feet fo'most, through the hole. I hedn't need to a been long; it wur a close shave an a tight fit, *it* wur. Jest as I hed got my head 'bout half through, the bleeze kim swizzin round, an nearly singed the *ears off o' me*. He, he, he—ho, ho, hoo!"

Garey and I joined in the laugh, at what we both knew to be one of Old Rube's favorite jokes; but Rube himself chuckled so long, that we became impatient to hear the end of his adventure.

"Well!" interrupted Garey, "consarn your old skin! what next?"

"Wagh!" continued the trapper, "the way thet bleeze did kum wur a caution to snakes. It roared and screeched, an yowlted an hissed, an the weeds crackled like a million o' wagon-whups! I wur like to be spiflicated wi' the smoke, but I contruv to pull down the flap o' hide, an thet gin me some relief, though I wur well-nigh choked afore I got the thing fixed. So hur I lay till I heern you fellurs palaverin about a 'bacca-pipe an thurfur I knowd the hul thing wur over. Wagh!"

And with this exclamation Rube ended his narration, and once more betook himself to the butchering of the already half roasted buffalo.

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Garey and I lent a hand; and having cut out the hump-ribs and other titbits, we returned to the camp. What with broiled hyodons, roast ribs, tongue, and marrow-bones, we had no reason for that night to be dissatisfied with the hospitality of the prairies.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MESA.

After a breakfast of buffalo-flesh, seasoned with splendid appetites, and washed down by a cup of cold water from the arroyo, we "saddled up," and headed for a high *butte*, just visible over the plain. My companions knew the landmark well. It lay directly in our route. We should pass near its base, and a ride of ten miles further would bring us to the end of our journey; indeed, the eminence was within sight of the rancheria. From the roof of the alcalde's house, I had frequently noticed it. In clear weather only was it visible, outlined against the horizon, in a northwesterly direction from the village.

Struck with the singularity of this prairie-mound, I had projected a visit to it; but circumstances had prevented me from carrying out my intention. I was now to have the pleasure of a nearer acquaintance with it.

I have called it singular Most isolated hills are conical, dome-shaped, or ridge-like; this one differed from the usual configuration—hence its singularity. It presented the appearance of a huge box set upon the prairie, not unlike that rare formation, the "cofre," which crowns the summit of the mountain Peroté. Its sides in the distance appeared perfectly vertical and its top as horizontal as the plain on which it rested.

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As we drew nearer, I could perceive, by the dark parapet-like band along its crest, that it was covered with a growth of timber. This was the more readily observed from contrast with the perpendicular sides, which were almost of a snowy whiteness, on account of the gypsum, chalk, or milky quartz of which the rock was composed. The most peculiar feature of the mound was perhaps its apparently regular form—a perfect parallelopipedon. But it was striking in other respects. Its sides glistened fantastically under the rays of the sun, as though it were studded with windows of glass. This, however, was easily accounted for; and I knew that the sparkling effect was produced by plates of mica or selenite that entered into the composition of the rock I had seen whole mountains that presented a similar appearance. More than one such exists in the great American Saära, in whose glittering cliffs, viewed from afar, may be found the origin of that wild chimera, the *mountain of gold.*

Although neither a mountain of gold nor silver, the mound in question was an object of rare interest. A very enchanted castle did it appear, and it was difficult to assign its formation to nature alone. Human agency, one could not help fancying, must have had something to do in piling up a structure so regular and compact. But he who has travelled over much of the earth's surface will have met with many "freaks" of nature, exhibiting like appearance of design, in her world of inorganic matter. It was, in fact, one of those formations of which many are met with in the plateaux-lands of America, known in Spanish phraseology as *mesas.* This name is given to them in allusion to the flat table-like tops, which distinguish them from other elevated summits. Sometimes one of these mesas is found hundreds of miles from any similar eminence; more frequently a number of them stand near each other, like truncated cones—the summits of all being on the same level, and often covered with a vegetation differing materially from that of the surrounding plains. Geologists have affirmed that these table-tops are the ancient level of the plains

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themselves; and that all around, and intervening between them, has either sunk or submitted to the degradation of water! It is a vague explanation, and scarcely satisfies the speculative mind. The *mesa* of Mexico is still a geological puzzle.

As we approached this singular object, I could not help regarding it with a degree of curiosity. I had seen mesa heights before—in the "mauvaise terre," upon the Missouri, in the Navajo country west of the Rocky Mountains, and along the edges of the "Llano Estacado," which of itself is a vast mesa. The mound before us was peculiar, from its very regular form, and the sparkling sheen of its cliffs. Its complete isolation, moreover, added to the effect—for no other eminence appeared in sight. The low hills that bordered the Rio Grande could barely be distinguished in the distance.

On getting nearer to it, its character became somewhat altered; the square box-like form appeared less regular, and it was then perceived that the parallelopipedon was not perfect. Slight ledges could be traced traversing the face of its cliffs, and here and there the rectangular lines were broken to the eye. Nature, after all, had not been so exact in her architecture. Yet, with every deduction, it was a singular structure to look upon, not the less so that its summit was inaccessible to human foot. A precipice fifty yards sheer fronted outward on all sides; no one had ever scaled this precipice—so alleged my companions, who were well acquainted with the locality.

We had approached within less than a mile of its base; our conversation had dropped—at least so far as I was concerned, my thoughts were occupied with the mound, and my eyes wandered over its outlines. I was endeavoring to make out the character of the vegetation which seemed to flourish luxuriantly on its summit. The dark foliage was evidently that of some species of acicular trees, perhaps the common red cedar (*Juniperus Virginiana*); but there were others of lighter hue—in all likelihood *piñons*, the pines with edible cones, peculiar to this

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region. I noticed, also, growing upon the very edge of the cliff, yuccas and aloes, whose radiating blades, stretching out, curved gracefully over the white rock. Forms of cactus, too, were apparent, and several plants of the great *pitahaya* rose high above the cliff, like gigantic candelabra, strange objects in such a situation.

My companions seemed to have no eyes for these rare vegetable beauties; I could hear them at intervals engaged in conversation; but the subject had no reference to the scene, and I paid little attention to what they were saying.

All at once I was startled by the voice of Garey, giving utterance to the emphatic announcement:

"Injuns, by—— !"

"Indians!—where?"

The interrogation escaped my lips. It was half-involuntary, and needed no reply. Garey's glance guided me; and, following its direction, I observed a string of horsemen just debouching from behind the mesa, and spurring forward upon the plain.

Both my companions had drawn bridle, and halted. I followed their example; and all three of us sat in our saddles, scanning this sudden apparition of mounted men. A dozen had now cleared themselves from behind the mesa, and were riding towards us.

We were yet nearly a mile from them; and at that distance it is difficult to distinguish a white man from an Indian—I should rather say impossible. Even at half the distance, the oldest prairie-men are sometimes puzzled. The garments are often not very dissimilar, and sun-bronze and dust confound the complexions. Although Garey, at first sight of them, had pronounced the horsemen to be Indians—the most probable supposition under the circumstances—it was but a random conjecture, and for some time we remained in doubt.

"If they're Injuns," suggested Garey, "they're Comanche."

"An if thur Kimanch," added Rube, with ominous emphasis,

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"we've got to fight. If thur Kimanch, thur on the war-trail, an thur'll be mischief in 'em. Wagh! Look to your flints ac primin!"

Rube's counsel was instantly followed. Necessity quickened our precautions. All of us well knew, that, should the approaching horsemen turn out to be Comanches, we had no alternative but fight.

This warlike nation occupies the whole western area of Texas, ranging from the Rio Grande on the south to the Arkansas on the north. They are to-day, with their kindred tribes, the most powerful Indian alliance on the continent. They affect the ownership of all prairie-land, styling themselves its "lords," though their sovereignty towards the north is successfully disputed by the Pawnees, Sioux, Blackfeet, and others as warlike as they. From the earliest times, they have been the *fiend* of the Texan settler; and a detailed account of their forays and pillaging expeditions would fill a score of volumes. But from these they have not gone back unscathed. The reprisals have outnumbered the assaults, and the rifle of the border ranger has done its work of vengeance. In Mexico they have found less puissant defenders of the hearth and home; and upon the north-eastern provinces of that unhappy country, the Comanches have been for the last half-century in the habit of making an annual foray of war and plunder. In fact, this has become the better part of their subsistence, as they usually return from their riev ing expeditions laden with spoil, and carrying with them vast droves of horses, mules, horned cattle, and *captive women*. For a short time these dusky freebooters were at peace with the Anglo-American colonists of Texas It was but a temporary armistice, brought about by Houston; but Lamar's administration, of a less pacific character, succeeded, and the settlers were again embroiled with the Indians. War to the knife was declared and carried on; red and white killed each other on sight. When two men met upon the prairie, the color of the skin determined

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ie relations between them! If they differed in this, they were enemies without parley, and to kill the other was the first thought of each. The *lex talionis* was the custom of the hour.

If the rancor could possibly have been augmented, an incident had just transpired calculated to have that effect. A band of Comanche warriors had offered their services to the commander-in-chief of the American army! They held the following language:

"Let us fight on your side. We have no quarrel with you. You are warriors: we know it, and respect you. We fight against the cowardly Mexicans, who robbed us of our country. We fight for Moctezuma!"

These words uttered along the whole northern frontier of Mexico, are full of strange import.

The American commander prudently declined the Comanche alliance; and the result was the bitter *triangular* war in which, as already noticed, we were now engaged.

If, then, the approaching horsemen were Indians of the Comanche tribe, Rube's forecast was correct; we had "got to fight."

With this understanding, we lost no time in putting ourselves in an attitude of defence. Hastily dismounting, and sheltering our bodies behind those of our horses, we awaited the approach of the band.

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CHAPTER XXX.

GUERRILLEROS.

The manœuvre had occupied only a few seconds of time, and the horsemen were yet distant. They had thrown themselves into a formation, and *were riding "by twos!"*

This movement took us by surprise. The tactics were not Indian: Comanches never march in double file. The horsemen could not be Indians. Who, then?

A sudden hope crossed my mind, that it might be a party of my own people, out in search of me. "By twos" was our favorite and habitual order of march. But no; the long lances and streaming pennons at once dissipated the hope: there was not a lance in the American army. They could not be "rangers."

Comanches on the *war-trail* would have been armed with the lance, but clearly they were *not* Comanches.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Rube, after eyeing them intently, "Ef thur Injuns, I'm a niggur! Ef thur Injuns, they've got beards an sombrayras, an thet a'n't Injun sign nohow. No!" he added, raising his voice, "thur a gang o' yellur-bellied Mexikins! thet's what they ur."

All three of us had arrived simultaneously at the same conviction. The horsemen were Mexicans.

It was no great source of rejoicing to know this; and the knowledge produced no change in our defensive attitude. We well knew that a band of Mexicans, armed as these were, could not be other than a hostile party, and bitter too in their hostility. For several weeks past, the *petite guerre* had been waged with dire vengeance. The neutral ground had been the scene of re-

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prisals, and terrible retaliations. On one side, wagon-trains had been attacked and captured, harmless teamsters murdered, or mutilated whilst still alive. I saw one with his arms cut off by the elbow-joints, his heart taken out, and thrust between his teeth! He was dead; but another whom I saw still lived, with the cross deeply gashed upon his breast, upon his brow, on the soles of his feet, and the palms of his hands—a horrid spectacle to look upon!

On the other side, ranchos were ransacked and ruined, villages given to the flames, and men on mere suspicion shot down upon the spot or hanged upon the nearest tree! Such a character had the war assumed; and under these circumstances, we knew that the approaching horsemen were our deadly foes.

Beyond a doubt, it was either a scouting party of Mexican lancers, a *guerilla*, or a band of robbers. During the war, the two last were nearly synonymous, and the first not unfrequently partook of the character of both.

One thing that puzzled us—what could any of the three be doing in that quarter? The neutral ground—the scene of *guerilla* operations—lay between the two armies; and we were now far remote from it; in fact, altogether away from the settlements. What could have brought lancers, guerilleros, or robbers, out upon the plains? There was no *game* in that quarter for any of these gentry—neither an American force to be attacked, nor a traveller to be plundered! My own troop was the out-picket in this direction, and it was full ten miles off. The only thing likely to be met with near the mesa was a war-party of Comanches, and we knew the Mexicans well enough to be convinced that, whether soldiers or freebooters, they were *not* in search of that

Such reflections, made in double-quick time, occurred to us as we scanned the advancing troop.

Up to this moment, they had ridden directly towards us, and were now nearly in a line between us and the mesa. On getting

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within about half a mile of our position, they turned sharply toward the west, and rode as if to make round to our rear! This manœuvre of course placed us upon their flank; and now, outlined against the sky, we could distinctly trace their forms and note their habiliments and armour. Nearly all wore broad brimmed sombreros, with jacket, sash, and calzoneros. They carried lances, lazoes, and carbines or *escopettes*. We could distinguish sabres and *machetés*—the universal weapon of the Mexican ranchero. They could not be drilled troops. Their costumes, as well as a certain irregularity in their manœuvring, forbade this supposition. Their lances, moreover, were borne in all sorts of ways—some couched, some resting in the stirrup and held correctly, while others were carried over the shoulder like a firelock! No, they could not be a troop of regulars They were either *guerrilleros* or true *salteadores*.

After riding nearly a half-circle round—still keeping at the same distance—the troop suddenly made front towards us, and halted.

We had been puzzled by their going round; we could not divine their object in so doing. It could not be to cut off our retreat. The timber in the back direction was miles off. Had it been near enough, we should certainly have retreated to it long before; but we knew it was too distant. Rube and his old mare would have been overtaken by our well-mounted enemies, long ere we could have gained the woods; we knew this, and therefore did not think of making the attempt. On the other side was the *mesa*, which, by their late movement had been left open to us. It was but a half mile off, and perhaps, by making a dash, we might have reached it; but not a tree grew near it—except those on its summit—and its rocky wall apparently offered no advantage to us, any more than the open plain The enemy seemed to be aware of this, else they would not have ridden round, and thus left the way clear.

Until the moment of their halt, therefore, we remained ignor

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ant of their motive in moving to our rear; *then* it was explained. Their object was evident to all of us: they had halted between us and the sun!

It was a cunning manœuvre, worthy of a war-party of Indians and told us we had no common enemy to deal with. By approaching us from that direction, they would have a decided advantage; our aim would be spoiled by the sun—now low down upon the horizon, and gleaming right in our eyes. My companions were wroth at the trick that had been thus played so adroitly; though we could not have hindered it even if forewarned.

We were allowed but little time to reflect upon the matter; we saw by the movements of the horsemen that they were preparing to charge. One who appeared to be the leader, mounted upon a larger horse than any of the rest, was addressing them. He rode along the line speaking in a loud tone, and gesticulating violently; he was answered with *vivas*, which we could plainly hear. Every moment we looked to see them gallop forward.

We knew there was no alternative but fight or surrender, though not one of us entertained an idea of the latter; for myself, I should as soon have thought of turning my pistol to my own head. My uniform, tattered as it was, would easily reveal my character to the enemy; and, if captured, I knew I should be hung, or perhaps in the absence of trees, shot down upon the spot. My comrades had reasons for knowing that *their* shrift would be equally short: neither thought for a moment of tamely yielding.

"No!" emphatically pronounced Rube, "this child don't guv in, till he's rubbed out, *he* don't! Tarnation odds too!" he added, looking towards the troop; "twelve agin three o' us. Durn the odds! I've got clur o' wuss scrapes than 't looks yit, and so 've you, Bill Garey—hain't we, boyee? Durn the odds! let 'em kum on?"

"Ay," responded Garey, without the slightest show of excitement, "they'd better not come too near 'ithout tellin thar bisness

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I see one saddle that I'll empty the minnit they pass you weed.' And the speaker indicated a bunch of the *artemisia* plant that grew some two hundred paces off in the direction of the horsemen.

The reckless talk of the old trapper, with the contrasted cool bearing of his younger companion, had fixed my nerves fully. At the first sight of so many adversaries, I was not without some misgivings—in fact, I felt fear. Such odds against us—four to one—was fair cause for apprehension. But it was not my first fight against large odds, both Indian and Mexican; and on that account I regarded it the less seriously.

Notwithstanding the superiority of our enemy in number, I knew we were not so unequal. Unless shot down by the first volley of their carbines and escopettes, each of our three rifles was sure of its man. I had confidence in my own weapon, and a still more perfect reliance on those of my comrades. They were men that never missed—men who never fired a random shot—never drew trigger till their aim was sure. I felt certain, therefore, that should the horsemen charge upon us, only *nine* of the twelve would ever come within pistol-shot, and for that distance we were well prepared. I carried in my belt a six-chambered revolver, one of Colt's best; Garey had another—a present I had made him many years before—and Rube was armed with a pair of stout single barrels, like enough to do good service.

"Seventeen shots! wi' our bowies to fall back upon!" cried Garey triumphantly, as we finished a hasty survey of our arms.

As yet the enemy did not advance; notwithstanding their *vivas* and ejaculations, they appeared to hesitate about charging. Their leader, and another—a lieutenant, perhaps—were still seen riding along their line, as if animating them by further speech, and giving them orders how to act.

Meanwhile, *we* had not been idle; we had *formed square* to receive the charge! You may smile, but such was in reality the

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case We had formed square—with our horses! There were four of them, for the wild horse counted one. Garey, who rode like a Comanche, had broken him at our last camp, and he was now perfectly tractable. The shake of a lazo rendered him docile as a lamb.

The four were tied head to head, and croup to croup, and each formed one side of the square. They could not have broken it even under a charge of cavalry; bridles must be untied or cut, and lazoes set loose, before that *formation* could be destroyed!

Within stood we, fronting our foes—the large horse of Garey forming our barricade—our heads and feet alone visible to the enemy.

Thus did we await their onset.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PARLEY.

ANOTHER chorus of *vivas* announced that the guerrilla chief had finished his oration, and that the attack was about to be made. We saw him, with one or two others, advance in front of the line, and head towards us, evidently intending to lead the charge.

"Now!" muttered Rube, in a sharp quick tone, "guns ready boys! no waste shots, d' yur hear? Lead counts hyur—*it* do. See! By the jumpin Geehosophat, thur a gwine to ride right down! Let 'em kum on, and be ——! Thur's one o' 'em won't git this fur—I mout say two—I mout say three i'deed. Durn the glint o' thet sun! Billee!" he continued, addressing Garey, "ee 'll shoot fust; yur gun's furrest carry. Plug the big un or

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the clay-bank hoss. This child's for No. 2 on the grey mustang An, young fellur! ee'll jest pick off thet niggur on the roan. I know yur wild cat to the bone, but keep yur eye skinned, and yur narves steady, d' yur hear?"

"Yes, yes!" I hurriedly answered, though at the time steadiness of nerves was easier promised than practised. My heart was heaving in quick pulsations at the near prospect of the terrible drama about to be enacted.

At this moment the "Forward" fell upon our ears, and with the wild notes of the bugle came the words:

"*Andela! anda! Dios y Guadalupe!*"

In an instant, the troop was in motion, and pressed forward, galloping to the charge.

They had not made many stretches before their line became broken, several of the swiftest or most courageous forging ahead of the others.

"The three fo'most!" cried Rube, in the same sharp tone—"the three fo'most! That'll fotch 'em up wi' a roun turn, or this child's mistaken. Now, boyees! mind yur eyes! Steady! Stea-dy—stea-dy"——

All at once, Rube's muttered cautions, slowly drawled out, were changed to an exclamation that betokened surprise, followed by a long low whistle of the same import! The cause was clear. The guerrilleros had got within three hundred yards of us, still going at a gallop, but we could perceive that their pace slackened as they advanced; already it was more of an amble, than the forward dash of an earnest charge. It was evident they had no stomach for the business—now that they were near enough to see the shining barrels and black hollow tubes of our revelled rifles.

Garey was waiting till the foremost should pass the artemisia bush; for by that he had long since calculated the point-blank range of his rifle. Another moment, and its crack would have been heard; but the horseman, as if warned by instinct, seemed

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to divine the exact limit of danger Before reaching the bush, his heart failed him, and in a wavering, irresolute manner, he drew bridle, and halted! The others, nothing loath, followed his example, until the whole troop had pulled up within less than three hundred yards of the muzzles of our guns!

"Cowed, by ——!" shouted Rube with a derisive laugh. "Halloo!" continued he, raising his voice still louder, and addressing the halted line: "what the h—ll do ee want, anyhow?"

Whether Rube's interrogatory was understood or not, it elicited a reply:

"*Amigos! somos amigos!*" (We are friends!) shouted back the leader of the band.

"Friends be durned!" exclaimed the trapper, who knew enough of Spanish to understand the signification of *amigos*. "Nice friends you! Wagh! D'yur think to bamfoozle us thet away? Keep yur distance now!" continued he, raising his rifle in a threatening manner, as a movement was perceptible among the horsemen. "Keep yur distance, or, by the tarnal airthquake! I'll plug the fust o' ye thet rides within reach. Durn such friends as you!"

The leader now conversed in a low tone with his lieutenant. Some new design seemed to have been devised between them—and after a while, the former again addressed us; speaking as before in Spanish.

"We are friends!" said he: "we mean you no harm. To prove it, I will order my men to fall back upon the prairie, while my lieutenant, unarmed, will meet one of you on the neutral ground. Surely, you can have no objection to that?"

"And why such an arrangement?" inquired Garey, who spoke Spanish fluently. "We want nothing of *you*. What do you want from *us*, with all this durn'd fuss?"

"I have business with you," replied the Mexican; "and *you*, sir, in particular. I have something to say to you I don't wish others to hear."

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As he said this, the speaker turned his head, and nodded significantly towards his own following. He was candid with them at least.

This unexpected dialogue took all three of us by surprise. What could the man want with Garey? The latter knew nothing of him—had never, as he declared, "sot eyes on the niggur before;" although at such a distance—with the sun in his face, and the Mexican's sombrero slouched as it was—Garey might be mistaken. It might be some one whom he had met, though he could not recall him to mind.

After a short consultation, we agreed that Garey should accept the proposal. No evil could result from it—none that we could think of. Garey could easily get back, before any attack could be made upon him, and Rube and I should still be ready to protect him with our pieces. If they meditated treachery, we could not perceive the advantage they were to gain from the proceeding.

The "parley" therefore was accepted, and the conditions arranged with due caution on our part. The horsemen—with the exception of the leader and his lieutenant—were to ride back to the distance of half a mile; the leader was to remain where he was; and half-way between him and us, Garey and the lieutenant were to meet, both of them on foot and unarmed.

At an order from their chief, the guerrilleros fell back. The lieutenant dismounted, laid his lance along the ground, unbuckled his sabre, drew the pistols from his belt, and placing them beside the lance, advanced towards the appointed spot.

Garey had likewise disarmed himself; and leaving his weapons in charge of Rube and myself, stepped forth to meet the Mexican. In another minute, the two stood face to face, and the "parley" began.

It was of short duration. The speaking, which appeared to be principally done by the Mexican, was carried on in a low tone; and Rube and I saw that he pointed frequently in our direction

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as if we were the subject of his discourse! We observed that his harangue was suddenly interrupted by Garey, who, turning round at the same instant, cried out to us in English:

"Hillow, Rube! what do yer think the skunk wants?"

"How shed I know?" replied Rube. "What do 'e want?"

"Why, he wants"—Garey's voice rose louder with indignation—"he wants us to give up the *ranger-captain;* an sez, if we do, you an me can go free. Ha, ha, ha!" and the young trapper ended his announcement with a scornful laugh.

Simultaneous with Garey's laugh, I could hear Rube utter a low whistle, and the words "thet's how the stick floats;" and, then raising his voice, he called out:

"An what answer hev you gin him, Billee?"

"I hain't answered him yet," was the prompt reply; "but hyar's the answer!"

I saw Garey's arm raised, with his huge fist clenched; I saw it descend like a trip-hammer upon the face of the Mexican, who with the blow fell heavily to the earth!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DEAD SHOT.

The unexpected closing of the conference elicited an angry shout from the Mexican horsemen; and, without waiting for orders, they galloped up to their chief. Halting at long range, they fired their carbines and escopettes; but their bullets cut the grass far in front of us, and one or two that hurtled past, were wide of the mark.

The lieutenant, who had been only stunned, soon recovered his legs, but not his temper. His wrath overbalanced his pru

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dence, else the moment he found his feet, he would have made the best of his way to his horse and comrades. Instead of doing so, he turned full front towards us, raised his arm in the air, shook his clenched hand in a menacing manner, accompanying the action with a torrent of defiant speech. Of what he said, we understood but the concluding phrase, and that was the bitter and blasphemous *carajo!* that hissed through his teeth with the energetic aspiration of rage and revenge.

That oath was the last word he ever uttered; his parting breath scarcely carried it from his lips, ere he ceased to live. I heard the fierce word, and almost simultaneously, the crack of a rifle, fired close to my ear. I saw the dust puff out from the embroidered spencer of the Mexican, and directly over his heart; I saw his hand pass rapidly to the spot, and the next moment he fell forward upon his face!

Without a groan, without a struggle, he lay as he had fallen, spread dead and motionless upon the prairie!

"Thur, durn yur carako!" cried a voice at my shoulder; "ee won't *bid* for me agin, ee skunk—thet ee won't!"

I needed no explanation, though I turned involuntarily to the speaker. Of course it was Rube. His rifle was smoking at the muzzle, and he was proceeding to reload it.

"Wa-hoo—woop!" continued he, uttering his wild war-cry; "thet shortens thur count, I reck'n. Another nick for Targuts! Gi' me *her* for a gun. Wagh! a long pull it wur for the ole weepun; and the glint in my eyes too! The niggur riled me, or I wudn't a risked it. Hold yur hosses, boys!" he continued in a more earnest tone: "don't fire till I'm loaded—for yur lives don't!"

"All right, Rube!" cried Garey, who hastily passing under the belly of his horse, had re-entered the square, and once more handled his rifle. "All right, old boy! Ne'er a fear! we'll wait for ye."

Somewhat to our surprise, Rube was allowed ample time to

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reload, and our three barrels once more protruded over the shoulders of Garey's horse. Our animals still held their respective positions. Three of them were too well used to such scenes, to be startled by the detonation of a rifle; and the fourth fastened as he was, kept his place perforce.

I say, to our surprise, we were allowed time to get into our old vantage-ground; for we had expected an immediate charge from the guerrilla.

Vengeance for the death of their comrade would give them courage enough for that; so thought we; but we were mistaken, as their ire only vented itself in fierce yells, violent gestures, and loud cries.

They had clustered around their chief without order or formation. They seemed to pay but slight regard to his authority. Some appeared urging him to lead them on! Some came galloping nearer, and fired their carbines; others shook their lances in a threatening manner; but one and all were careful to keep outside that perilous circle, whose circumference marked the range of our rifles. They seemed even less inclined for close quarters than ever; the fate of their comrade had awed them.

The dead man lay about half-way between them and us, glittering in his picturesque habiliments. They were weaker by his loss, for not only had he been one of their leaders, but one of their best men. They saw he was dead, though none had dared to approach him They knew the Texan rifle of old—these spangled heroes; they saw, moreover, that we were armed with revolvers, and the fame of this terrible weapon had been already carried beyond the frontier of the Rio Grande.

Notwithstanding all that, men of our race, under similar circumstances, would have charged without hesitation. So, too, would men of theirs, three centuries ago.

Perhaps in that band was an Alvarado, a Sandoval, a Diaz or De Soto! only in name. O Cortez! and you *conquistadores*: could you behold your degenerate descendants!

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And yet not all of them were cowards; some, I dare say, were brave enough, for there *are* brave men among the Mexicans. A few were evidently willing to make the attack, but they wanted combination—they wanted a leader: he who acted as such appeared to be endowed with more discretion than valor.

Meanwhile, we kept our eyes fixed upon them, listening to heir varied cries, and closely watching their movements. In perfect coolness, we regarded them—at least so much can I say for my comrades. Though life or death rested upon the issue, both were as cool at that moment as if they had been only observing the movements of a gang of buffaloes! There was no sign of trepidation—hardly a symptom of excitement visible in the countenance of either. Now and then, a half-muttered ejaculation, a rapid exchange of thought, relating to some fresh movement of the enemy, alone told that both were alive to the peril of the situation.

I cannot affirm that I shared with them this extreme and perfect *sang froid;* though upon my nerves, less indifferent to danger, their example had its effect, and inspired me with courage sufficient for the occasion. Besides, I drew confidence from another source. In case of defeat, I had a resource unshared by my companions—perhaps unthought of by them. Trusting to the matchless speed of my horse, as a last resort, I might possibly escape. I could have ridden off at that moment without fear of being overtaken, but the craven thought was not entertained for an instant. By my honour, no! I should have accepted death upon the spot rather than desert the brave men who stood by my side. To *them* I was indebted for my life 'Twas for *me* that theirs was now in peril; and from the first moment I had determined to stand by them to the end, and sell my blood at its dearest. In the event of both falling before me, it would then be time to think of flight.

Even this contingency had the effect of strengthening my courage, and at that moment I viewed the vengeful foe with a

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coolness and freedom from fear that, in the retrospect, now surprises me.

During the interval of inaction that followed, I was cool enough to reflect upon the demand which the guerrilla leader had made—the surrender of my person. Why was *I* singled out? We were all enemies alike—all Americans or Texans—on Mexican soil, and armed for strife. Why did they want *me* alone? Was it because I was superior in rank to my companions? But how knew they this?—how knew they I was a "ranger captain?" Ha! they must have known it before; they must have come out specially in search of me!

A light flashed suddenly into my mind—a suspicion strong almost as certainty. But for the sun glancing in my eyes, I might have earlier obtained an explanation of the mystery. I drew down the visor of my forage-cap, stretching it to its full extent; I increased the shade with my flattened palms, and from under them strained my eyes upon the leader of the band. Already his voice, while in conversation with Garey, had aroused a faint recollection within me. I had heard that voice only once, but I thought I remembered it. Guided by my suspicion, I now scrutinized more closely the face of the man. Fortunately, it was turned towards me, and despite the dazzling of the sunbeam, despite the slouched sombrero, I recognized the dark features of Rafael Ijurra! In that glance I comprehended the situation. He it was who wanted the "ranger captain!"

There was doubt no longer. My suspicion was a certainty; but with the next throb of my heart rose another, a thousand times more painful—a suspicion of——

With an effort, I stifled my emotions; a movement was preceptible among the guerrilleros; the moment of action had arrived!

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

A RUNNING-SHOT.

THOUGH our enemy was once more in motion, we no longer anticipated a direct attack; the time for that had passed. The fate of their comrade had evidently checked their ardor, and too much shouting and bravado had cooled, rather than heightened, their enthusiasm. We could tell by their manœuvring that some new mode of assault had been planned, and was about to be practised.

"Cowardly skunks!" muttered Rube; "they hain't the pluck to charge us! Who ever heerd o' fair fight in a Mexikin? Wagh! Thur arter some trick," he continued, in a more serious tone. "What do'ee think it be, Billee?"

"I'm thinkin, old boy," replied Garey, whose keen grey eye had been for some time fixed on the movements of the guerrilla —"I'm thinkin thar a goin to gallup roun, an try a shot at us Injun fashion."

"Yur right," assented Rube; "thet's thur game! Scalp me ef 'taint! Look yander!—thur they go!"

The horsemen were no longer in line, nor formed in any fashion. Irregularly grouped, they exhibited a "clump" upon the prairie, some standing still, others in motion. As Rube uttered the last words, one of them was seen to shoot out from the main body, spurring his steed into a gallop as he parted from the crowd.

One might have fancied he was about to ride off from the ground: but no; that was not his intention. When he had made

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half-a-dozen stretches over the plain, he guided his horse into a curve, evidently with the design of riding around us.

As soon as he had gained some score of yards from the troop, a second horseman followed, repeating the manœuvre; and then another and another, until five of the band, thus deployed, galloped round us in circles. The remaining six kept their ground.

We observed that the five had left their lances behind them, and carried only their carbines.

We were not astonished at this: we divined the intention of our enemies. They were about to practise an old prairie-tactic—a stratagem of the horse-Indians, with which all three of us were familiar.

We might have been more apprehensive about the result had it been really Indians who were going to practise the manœuvre—since in an attack of this kind, the bow, with its many missiles in a minute, is far more dangerous than either carbine or rifle. But the fact that our assailants understood the stratagem told us we were opposed to men who had seen Indian-fight—no doubt, the pick men of the frontier—and to defend ourselves would require all the courage and cunning we possessed.

It did not surprise us that only a portion of the band galloped out to effect the surround; there was design in that, and we knew it. The five who had been detached were to wheel round us in circles, dash at intervals within range, fire their carbines, kill some of our horses, keep us distracted, and, if possible, *draw* the fire of our rifles. This purpose effected, the other six—who already approached as near as was safe for them—would charge forward, empty their guns, and then use their lazoes with effect.

Of this last *weapon* my companions had more dread than of all the others carried by our foes. They had reason. They knew that our rifles once empty, the lazo could be used beyond pistol-range; and by such men, with far surer aim than either carbine or escopette!

We were allowed but scant time to entertain these doubts

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fears, and conjectures, or to communicate them to one another They passed before us like the lightning's flash: the quicker that they were old thoughts—things familiar from experience We were conscious that the stratagem of our enemy had increased the peril of our situation; but we thought not yet of yielding to despair.

In an instant we had altered our relative positions. The three of us no longer fronted in one direction, but stood back to back —each to guard the third of the circle before his face. Thus stood we, rifles in hand.

The five horsemen were not slow in the execution of their manœuvre. Once or twice they galloped round us in a wide circle; and then following a spiral curve, drew nearer and nearer. When within carbine range, each fired his piece; and, retreating outwards upon the main body, hastily exchanged his empty gun for one that was loaded, and galloped back as before.

In the first volley, most of their bullets, discharged at random, had passed over our heads. We heard them hissing in the air high above us. One, however, had been better aimed, and struck Rube's mare in the hip, causing the old mustang to squeal and kick violently. It did but little damage, though it was an earnest of what we might expect; and it was with increased apprehension that we saw the horsemen come back on their circling career.

You will wonder why we did not return their fire? Our guns carried as far as theirs. Why did we not use them, while the horsemen were within range? Not one of the three of us thought of drawing a trigger! You will wonder at this? It equires explanation.

Know, then, that the five men who galloped round us were five of the best horsemen in the world—no doubt the picked riders of the band. Not in Arabia, not in the hippodromes of Paris or London, could they have found their superiors—perhaps not their equals, for these men literally lived in the saddle. Each

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as he approached the dangerous circle covered by our rifles, disappeared *behind the body of his horse.* A boot and spur over the hollow of the deep saddle-tree, perhaps a hand grasping the wither-lock of the horse, were all of the rider that could be seen. Presently a face might be observed, suddenly veiled by a puff of smoke from the carbine, and then ducked instantly out of sight. Perhaps the barrel of the piece might be noticed glancing along the horse's counter, while the stream of fire pouring forth, told that the rider had taken aim under the throat of his steed, the latter all the while going at full gallop.

During these manœuvres, sharp shots as my comrades were, and fair marksman as I was myself, there was no instant when we could have hit any one of the five horsemen. It would have been easier to have brought down a bird upon the wing. Their horses we might have killed or crippled, but that would not have repaid us for the risk of an empty rifle. We dared not waste a bullet on the horses. This, then, was our reason for reserving our fire.

Do not fancy from this my prolixity of explanation, that *we* were so slow in comprehending all this. No, we understood our situation well enough; we knew that to discharge our pieces—even though a horse should fall to every shot—was just what the enemy desired. That was the main point of their *ruse;* but we were too well used to the wiles of Indian warfare to be beguiled by so shallow an artifice. Words of caution passed between us, and we stood to our guns with as much patience as we could command.

It was tempting enough—provoking, I should rather say—thus to be fired at, without the chance of returning it; and my companions, notwithstanding their habitual coolness, chafed angrily under the infliction.

Once more the five horsemen came galloping around us, and discharged their pieces as before; but this time with more effect A bullet struck Garey in the shoulder, tearing away a patch of

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his hunting-shirt, and drawing the blood; while another went whizzing past the cheek of Old Rube, creasing his catskin cap!

"Hooray!" shouted the latter, clapping his hand over the place where the lead had wounded him. "Clost enough thet wur! Cuss me, ef't hain't carried away one o' my ears!"

And the old trapper accompanied the remark with a wild reckless laugh. The rent of the bullet, and the blood upon Garey's shoulder, now fell under his eye, and suddenly changing countenance, he exclaimed;

"By the tarnal! yur hit, Bill? Speak, boyee?"

"It's nothin," promptly replied Garey—"nothin; only a grease. I don't feel it."

"Yur sure?"

"Sartin sure."

"By the livin catamount!" exclaimed Rube, in a serious tone, "we can't stan this no longer. What's to be done, Billee? Think, boy!"

"We must make a burst for it," replied Garey; "it's our only chance."

"Tur no use," said Rube, with a doubtful shake of the head. "The young fellur mout git clur; but for you'n me thur's not the shaddy o' a chance. They'd catch up wi' the ole mar in the flappin o' a beaver's tail, an yur hoss ain't none o' the sooplest. Tur no use."

"I tell you it are, Rube," replied Garey impatiently. "You mount the white hoss—he's fast enough—and let the mar slide; or you take mine, an I'll back whitey. We mayent get clar altogether; but we'll string the niggers out on the parairy, an take them one arter another. It's better than stanuin hyar to be shot down like buffler in a pen. What do *you* think, capt'n?" added he, addressing himself to me.

Just then an idea had occurred to me. "Why not galiop to the cliff?" I inquired, looking toward the mesa: "thy can't surround us there? With our backs to the rock, and our horses

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in front of us, we may defy the rabble. We might easily reach it by a dash"——

"Scalp me! ef the young fellur ain't right," cried Rube, a errupting my speech "It 's the very idee, plum centre!"

"It are!" echoed Garey—"it are! We hain't a second to lose; they'll be round us again in a squull's jump. Look yonder!"

This conversation had occupied but a few seconds of time. It occurred just after the five horsemen had the second time emptied their guns, and galloped back to exchange them. Before they could return to deliver a third fire, our determination was taken, and we had hastily undone the fastenings of our horses, and were ready to mount. This we accomplished so quietly, that it was evident the enemy had not perceived us, and therefore entertained no suspicion of our design; hence the road towards the mesa was still perfectly open to us. In another minute, however the five riders would have been circling around us, and that would have naturally altered our situation.

"Hurry, Rube!" cried Garey—"hurry, man, and le's be off!"

"Keep cool, Billee," rejoined Rube, who was adjusting the bridle of Garey's horse. "Plenty o' time, I tell ee; they ain't a comin yit. Ho-hoo! ole gal!" he continued, addressing himself to the mare—"ho-hoo! we're a gwine to leave you ahint a bit, but I reck'n yo'll turn up agin. They won't eat ye, anyhow; so don't be skeart about thet, ole gal! Now, Billee, I'm ready."

It was time, for the riders were again spurring forward to surround us.

Without waiting to observe further, we all three leaped simultaneously on horseback; and, plying the spur deeply, shot off in a direct line for the mesa.

A glance behind showed us the guerrilleros—the whole band coming in full tilt after us, while their cries sounded in our ears To our satisfaction, we saw we had gained ground upon them—our sudden start having taken them by surprise, and produced

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in their ranks a momentary hesitation. We had no fear of being able to reach the mesa before they could overtake us.

For my own part, I could soon have ridden out of sight altogether; so could Garey, mounted on the white steed, that, with only a raw-hide halter, was behaving splendidly. It was Garey' own horse, a strong but slow brute, that delayed us; he was ridden by Rube; and it was well the chase was not to be a long one, else our pursuers would have easily overhauled *him*. Garey and I kept by his side.

"Don't be afeerd, Rube!" shouted Garey, in a tone of encouragement; "we ain't a goin to leave you—we'll stick thegither!"

"Yes," added I, in the excitement of the moment, "we live or die together!"

"Hooray, young fellur!" cried Rube, in a burst of wild gratitude—"hooray for you! I know yur the stuff, an won't leave me ahint, though I gin you the slip oncest—when you mistuk me for the grizzly. He, he, hoo! But then, you see twur no use o' my stickin to you—ne'er a bit o' good. Wagh! them niggurs ur gettin nigher!"

We were riding directly for the middle of the mesa, whose cliff, like a vast wall, rose up from the level plain. We headed for its central part, as though we expected some gate to open in the rock and give us shelter!

Shouts of astonishment could be heard mingling with the hoof-strokes. Some of the expressions we heard distinctly. "Whither go they?" "*Vaya!* do they intend to ride up the cliff?" "*Carrambo! van en la trampa!*" (Good! they are going into the trap!)

Shouts of exultation followed, as they saw us thus voluntarily placing ourselves in a position from which retreat appeared impossible.

They had been apprehensive, on our first galloping off, that we might be mounted on swift horses, and meditated escaping by

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speed; but on discovering that this was not our intention, cries of joyful import were heard; and as we approached the cliff, we saw them deploying behind us, with the design of hemming us in. It was just the movement we had anticipated, and the very thing we wished them to do.

We galloped up close to the rocky wall before drawing bridle, then, suddenly flinging ourselves to the ground, we placed our backs to the cliff, drew our horses in front of us, and holding the bridles in our teeth, raised our rifles towards the foe. Once more the three shinning tubes were levelled, promising certain death to the first who should approach within range.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RUBE'S CHARGER.

Our attitude of defence, thus suddenly assumed, produced a quick effect upon our pursuers, who pulled up simultaneously on the prairie. Some who had been foremost, and who fancied they had ridden too near, wheeled round and galloped back.

"Wagh!" ejaculated Rube; "jest look at 'em! they've tuk care to put plenty o' paraira atween our guns and thur cowardly karkidges. Wagh!"

We at once perceived the advantage of our new position. We could all three show front wherever the enemy threatened There was no longer any danger of their practising the surround The half-circle behind us was covered by the mesa, and that could not be scaled. We had only to guard the semicircle in front—in fact, less than a semicircle, for we now perceived that the place was *embayed*, a sort of re-entering angle formed by two oblique faces of the cliff. The walls that flanked it extended

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three hundred yards on either side, so that no cover commanded our position. For defence, we could not have chosen a better situation; gallop round as they might, the guerrilleros would always find us with our teeth towards them! We saw our advantage at a glance.

Neither were our enemies slow to perceive it, and their exulting shouts changed to exclamation that betokened their disappointment.

Almost as suddenly, their tone again changed, and cries of triumph once more rose along their line.

We looked forth to discover the cause. To our dismay, we perceived a reinforcement just joining them! Five fresh horsemen were riding up, evidently a portion of the band. They appeared to have come from behind the mesa—from the direction of the rancheria—though, as we galloped forward, we had not observed them: the mound had concealed them from our view. Notwithstanding this accession to their strength, their courage did not appear to gain by it.

Almost on the instant that their new allies arrived upon the ground, the troop filed of by twos, and deployed across the mouth of the little bay in which we had taken shelter. The movement was soon completed, and six pair of them were now ranged before us at equal distances from each other. The remaining three—Ijurra and two others—kept their places directly in front of us. In one of the latter I recognized a ruffian whom I had frequently noticed at the ranchera. He was a man of large size, and, what is rare among Mexicans, red haired; but I believe he was a *Vizcaino*. He was familiarly known by the sobriquet of *El Zorro* (the Fox), probably on account of the hue of his hair; and I had heard from good authority—that of the *alcalde himself*—that the fellow was neither more nor less than a *salteador*. Indeed, El Zorro made little secret of his calling. The brigand of Mexico is usually well-known to his countrymen. During his intervals of leisure, he appears in the populous town, walks

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boldly through the streets, and freely mingles in society. Such was El Zorro, one of the right-hand men of Ijurra.

The design of our enemy was now manifest: they had no intention of making an immediate attack upon us; they saw that our retreat was impossible, and had resolved to hold us in siege, perhaps till thirst and hunger should force us to surrender.

Their calculation was founded on probability. If their valour was weak, their cunning was strong and subtile.

Rube was now greatly "out of sorts." When he saw the guerrilleros "fixing" themselves in the manner described, he seemed to regret that we had taken our stand there.

"We'er hyur!" he exclaimed peevishly, "an how ar we to git clur agin? Scalp me, Bill! ef we hedn't better a fit 'em on the paraira, an afore we gits weak wi' hunger. Wagh! I kud eat a griskin now, an a good chunk o' a one. Ay, smoke away!" (some of the Mexicans had lighted their cigars, and were coolly puffing at them)—"smoke away, durn yur! yur yeller-skinned skunks! I'll make some o' ye smoke afore mornin, or my name ain't Rube Rawlins. Gi's a bit o' bacca, Bill; maybe it'll take the edge off o' my stummuk. Wagh! I feel as holler about the kidneys as my ole mar—— Geehosophat! See the mar?"

The emphatic utterance of the last words caused Garey and myself to look towards the speaker, and then in the direction in which he pointed. A scene came before our eyes, that, spite the depression of our spirits, caused both of us to break into loud laughter.

The "ole mar," that for many long years had carried Rube over the mountains and prairies, was a creature that scarce yielded to himself in peculiarity.

She was a lank, bare-ribbed, high-boned animal, long-eared like all of her race, for she belonged to the race of Rosinante. The long ears caused her to look mulish, and at a distance she might have been mistaken for a mixed breed; but it was not so—she was a true mustang, and, spite of her degenerate look, a

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pure Andalusian. She seemed to have been, at an earlier period of her life, of that dun yellowish colour known as "clay bank"—a common hue among Mexican horses; but time and scars had metamorphosed her, and gray hairs predominated, particularly about the head and neck. These parts were covered with a dirty grizzle of mixed colour. She was badly wind-broken, and at stated intervals, of several minutes each, her back, from the spasmodic action of the lungs, heaved up with a jerk, as though she was trying to kick, and couldn't. Her body was as thin as a rail, and her head habitually carried below the level of her shoulders; but there was something in the twinkle of her solitary eye—for she had but one—that told you she had no intention of giving up for a long time to come. As Rube often alleged, "she was game to the backbone.

Such was the "ole mar," and it was to her that our attention was now so suddenly called.

Having parted from her on the prairie, in the wild gallop that followed, we had thought no more of the creature, not caring—that is, Garey and myself—what became of her. Rube, however, was far from sharing our indifference as to her fate. He would almost as soon have parted with one of his "claws" as that same faithful companion, and we had heard him expressing his hopes that no harm would come to her.

Of course, we had concluded that she would either be shot or lazoed by one of the guerrilleros. It appeared, however, that this was not to be her fate just then. Resolving not to be parted from her master so easily, she had galloped after us. Being slow, she soon fell behind, and for a while was mixed up with the horses of the guerrilleros. Of course the men had noticed her, but seeing that she was a worthless brute, had not deigned to make a capture of her.

In due time she fell into the rear of the whole troop; but even that did not turn her from her original intention, and at the moment of Rube's exclamation, she was jest breaking through

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the line of deployment on her way to join him. From the manner in which her nose was held as she ran, she appeared to be trailing him by the scent.

Seeing her pass, one of the guerrilleros dashed after to capture her; perhaps because there was an old saddle with some of Rube's traps buckled upon it. Mare, saddle, and all, were scarcely worth the fling of a lazo, and so the man appeared to think; for instead of using his lazo, he rode forward with the intention of seizing the mare by the bridle.

The feat proved not so easy of accomplishment. As the fellow bent down to grasp the rein, the old mare uttered one of her wild squeals, slewed her hind-quarters about, and raising her heels high in the air, delivered them right upon the ribs of the Mexican. The heavy "thud" was heard by all of us; and the man swayed from his saddle, and fell to the ground—to all appearance badly hurt, and most probably with a pair of broken ribs.

The squeal of the mare was echoed by a shrill laugh from the throat of her delighted master; and not until she had galloped up to him, did he cease to made the rocks ring with his wild cachinnations.

"Wa-hoo—woop! yur thur, ole gal!" he shouted as the animal halted before him. "You gin 'im a sockdolloger—*you* did. Yeeup! ole blueskin! yur welkum back! an ye've fotched my saddle too! Hooray! Ain't she a beauty, Bill? She's wuth her weight in beaver-plew. Wagh! that 'ee ur, ole beeswax! Kum hyur this away—thur now!"

And the speaker proceeded, after some more apostrophizing, to draw the animal closer up to the cliff, placing her body as an additional barricade in front of his own.

Our involuntary mirth was of short duration; it was interrupted by an object that filled our hearts with new apprehension.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

EL ZORRO

The new object of dread was a large gun, which had been brought upon the ground by one of those lately arrived. In all probability, it belonged to El Zorro, as it was in his hands we first observed it. It appeared to be a long musket, or elephant-gun, such as the "roers" in use among South African hunters. Whatever sort of weapon it was, we soon found, to our annoyance, that it pitched an ounce of lead nearly twice as far as any of our rifles, and with sufficient precision to make it probable that, before the sun had set, El Zorro would be able to pick off our horses, and perhaps ourselves, in detail. It would be half an hour before darkness could screen us with its friendly shelter, and he had already commenced practice. His first shot had been fired. The bullet struck the cliff close to my own head, scattering the fragments of gypsum rock about my ears, and then fell, flattened like a Spanish dollar, at my feet.

The report was far louder than that of either carbine or escopette; and an ejaculation from Rube, as he saw the effect of the shot, followed by his usual ominous whistle, told that the old trapper was not disposed to make light of this new piece of ordnance. Neither was Garey His look testified to what all three of us were thinking—which was, that this mode of attack was likely to put us in a more awkward dilemma than we had yet been placed in. El Zorro might shoot us down at his leisure With our rifles, we could neither answer his fire, nor silence it Our peril was obvious.

The salteador had delivered his first shot "off hand," for we

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had seen him level the piece. Perhaps it was fortunate for us he had not taken aim over a "lean;" but fortune from that source was not going to favour us any farther; for we now observed Ijurra stick two lances obliquely in the ground, so as to cross each other at a proper height, thus forming as perfect a rest as marksman could have desired.

As soon as the gun was reloaded, El Zorro knelt behind the lances, placed his barrel in the fork, and once more took aim.

I felt satisfied he was aiming at *me*, or my horse. Indeed, the direction of the long dark tube would have told me so; but I saw Ijurra directing him, and that made me sure of it. I had little fear for myself. I was sheltered sufficiently, but I trembled for the brave horse that shielded me.

I waited with anxious heart. I saw the blaze of the priming as it puffed upward; the red flame projected from the muzzle, and simultaneously I felt the shock of the heavy bullet striking upon my horse. Splinters of wood flew about my face; they were fragments of the saddle-tree. The ball had passed through the pommel, but my noble steed was untouched! It was a close shot, however—too close to allow of rejoicing, so long as others of the like were to follow.

I was getting as "riled" as Rube himself, when, all at once, a significant shout from the old trapper drew my attention from El Zorro and his gun. Rube was on my right, and I saw that he was pointing along the bottom of the cliff to some object in that direction. I could not see what it was, as his horses were in the way; but the next moment I observed him hurrying them along the cliff, at the same time calling to Garey and myself to follow.

I lost no time in putting my horse in motion, and Garey as hastily trotted after.

We had not advanced many paces before we comprehended the strange behaviour of our companion.

Scarcely twenty yards from where we had first halted, a large

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rock rested upon the plain. It was a fragment that had fallen from the cliff, and was now lying several feet from its base; it was of such size, and in such a position, that there was ample space behind it to shelter both men and horses—room for us all!

We were only astonished we had not observed it sooner; but this was not to be wondered at, for its colour corresponded exactly with that of the cliff, and it was difficult, even at twenty yards' distance, to distinguish it from the latter. Besides, our eyes, from the moment of our halting, had been turned in another direction.

We did not stay to give words to our surprise; but hurrying our horses along with us, with joyful exclamations we glided behind the rock.

It was not an echo of our joy, but a cry of disappointed rage that pealed along the line of the guerrilla. They saw at once that their long gun would no longer avail them, and both Ijurra and his marksmen were now seen dancing over the ground like madmen. El Zorro's *métier* was at an end.

A more perfect "harbour of refuge" could not have been found in all prairie-land. As Garey alleged, it "beat tree-timber all hollow!" A little fortress, in fact, in which we might defy even twice the number of our assailants—unless, indeed, they should wax desperately brave, and try us hand to hand.

Our sudden disappearance had created a new sensation in their ranks. From their shouts, we could tell that some of them regarded it with feelings of wonder—perhaps with emotions of a still stronger kind. We could hear the exclamations "*Carrai!*" "*Carrambo!*" with the phrase "*los demonios!*" passing from mouth to mouth. Indeed, from the position which they occupied, it must have appeared to them that we had gone into the cliff! The separation of the rock from the wall behind it was not perceptible from the plain, else *we* should have perceived it as we rode forward.

If our enemies knew of this out-lying boulder, it was strange

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they had left the way open to so safe a retreat—strange, since it did not correspond with the cunning they had otherwise given proofs of—and yet stranger they should be ignorant of its existence. Most of them were natives of this frontier, and must have frequently visited the mesa, which was one of the "lions" of the district. Perhaps they had never troubled their thoughts about it. There is no people who takes less interest in the rare features of their beautiful country than the Mexicans. Nature charms them not. A Mexican dwelling with a garden around it is a rarity—a lawn or a shrubbery is never seen; but indeed nature has bounteously supplied them with all these. They dwell amidst scenes of picturesque beauty; they gaze over green savannas—down into deep barrancas—up to the snow-crowned summits of mighty mountains—without experiencing one emotion of the sublime. A tortured bull, a steel-galved cock, Roman candles, and the Chinese wheel, are to them the sights of superior interest, and furnish them with all their petty emotions. So is it with nations, as with men who have passed the age of their strength, and reached the period of senility and second childhood.

But there was another and perhaps a better, reason why none of our adversaries should be intimate with the locality. As my companions alleged, the spot was a favorite halting-place of the Comanches—*they* have an eye for the picturesque—but perhaps the existence of a spring that was near had more to do in guiding the preference of these "lords of the prairies." The mesa, therefore, had for years been dangerous ground, and little trodden by the idle curious Possibly not one of the heroes we saw before us had for years ventured so far out upon the plains

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CHAPTER XXXV.

A PLAN OF ESCAPE.

If our enemies were awed by our sudden disappearance, it was soon robbed of its mysterious character. Our faces, and the dark barrels of our rifles, visible around the edges of the white rock, must have dispelled all ideas of the supernatural. Having hastily disposed of our horses, we had placed ourselves thus—in case of a charge being made—though of this we had no longer any great apprehension; and still less as we watched the movements of our adversaries.

El Zorro continued for some time to fire his big gun—the bullets of which we could dodge as easily as if they had been turnips hurled at us—and the leaden missiles fell harmlessly at our feet. Seeing this, the salteador at length ceased firing, and with another, rode off in the direction of the settlements, no doubt on some errand.

One pair of eyes was sufficient to watch the movements of the besiegers. Garey undertook this duty, leaving Rube and myself free to think over some plan of escape.

That we were not to be attacked was now certain. We had the choice, then, of two alternatives—either to keep the position we were in till thirst should force us to surrender, or attack *them*, and by a bold *coup* cut our way through their line. As to the former, we well knew that thirst would soon compel us to yield. Hunger we dreaded not. We had our knives, and before us a plentiful stock of that food on which the prairie wanderer often sustains life. "Horse-beef" we had all eaten, and could do so again; but for the sister appetite—thirst—we had made

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no provision. Our gourd-canteens were empty—had been empty for hours—we were actually pushing for the *mesa spring* when the enemy first came in sight. We were then athirst; but the excitement of the skirmish, with the play of passion incident thereto, had augmented the appetite, and already were we a prey to its keenest pangs. We mumbled as we talked, for each of us was chewing the leaden bullet. Thirst, then, we dreaded even more than our armed enemy.

The other alternative was a desperate one—now more desperate than ever, from the increased number of our foes. To cut our way through them had no other signification than to fight the whole party hand to hand; and we regretted we had not done so when only eleven were opposed to us.

A little reflection, however, convinced us that we were in a yet better position. We could make the attempt in the darkness. Night would favour us to some extent. Could we succeed by a bold dash in breaking through their deployed line, we might escape under the friendly cover of darkness, and the confusion consequent upon the mêlée.

There was probability in this. The boldest was clearly the wisest course we could pursue. Desperate it appeared. One or other of us might fall, but it offered the only hope that *any* of us might get free, for we knew that to surrender was to be shot—perhaps worse—*tortured.*

We had but faint hopes of a rescue, so faint, we scarcely entertained them. I knew that my friends, the rangers, would be in search of me. Wheatley and Holingsworth would not give me up without making an effort for my recovery; but then the search would be made in a different direction—that in which I had gone, and which lay many miles from the route by the mesa. Even had they thought of sending to the mound, the search must have been already made, and the party returned from it. Too long time had elapsed to make any calculation on a chance like this The hope was not worth holding, and we held it not

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For some time, Rube and I thought in combination, canvassing the details of the plan that had offered. After a while we stood, apart, and each pursued the train of his own reflections.

I declare that in that hour I had more painful thoughts than those that sprung from the peril of my situation; this I solemnly declare.

I have already said, that when I first recognized the leader of the guerrilla, I experienced an unpleasant suspicion. Since then, I had not time to dwell upon it—self-preservation engrossing all my thoughts. Now, that I found more leisure for reflection, the dire doubt returned in full strength, and I bitterly pondered upon it. Need I name the subject of my wretched reflections? Isolina de Vargas!

Knew *she* of this? Knew she that Ijurra was the chief of a guerrilla? Her cousin—sharer of the same roof—she could scarcely be ignorant of it! Who set him on our trail? Oh, bitter thought! was the hunt of the wild-horse a *ruse*—a scheme—to separate me from my command, and thus render it an easier prey to the Mexican guerrilleros? Perhaps my straggling followers were by this cut off? Perhaps the post had been attacked by a large body of the enemy—captured? I was not only to lose life, but had already lost my honor. I, the proud captain of a boasted troop, to be thus entrapped by artifice—the artifice of a woman!

My heart, overwhelmed with such bitter fancies, stayed not to reason.

Presently followed a calmer interval, and I begun to discuss the probability of my suspicions. What motive could she have to plot my destruction? Surely not from any feeling of love for her country, and hatred towards its enemies? From all I had learned, no such sentiment existed in her mind, but rather an opposite one—a truer patriotism. She was a woman of sufficient aim and intellect to have a feeling one way or the other; but had I not good grounds for believing her a friend to our

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cause; a foe to the tyrants we would conquer? If otherwise, I was the victim of profound deception and unparalleled hypocrisy!

Perhaps, however, her feeling was personal, not national. Was *I* alone the object of her hatred? Had I done aught by word or deed to call forth her antagonism—to deserve such cruel vengeance? If so, I was sadly ignorant of the fact. If she hated me, she hated one who loved *her*, with his whole soul absorbed in the passion. But no, I could not think that I was an object of hatred to her. Why should she hate me? How *could* she?

I could think of but one motive why she should make herself instrumental in the accomplishment of my ruin. It was explicable only on the presumption that she was attached to Ijurra—that Rafael Ijurra was the lord of her heart. If so, he could easily bend it to his will—for this is but the sequence of the other—could influence her to whatever act.

As for Ijurra, there was motive enough for his hostility, even to the seeking of my life. The insult put upon him at our first meeting—the knowledge that I loved *her*—for I was certain he knew it—with the additional fact that I was an enemy—one of the invaders—of his country. These were sufficient motives though, doubtless, the two first far outweighed the other: with Rafael Ijurra, revenge and jealousy were stronger passions than patriotism.

Then came consolation—thoughts of brighter hue. In the face of all was the fact, that *the white steed had been found*, and captured! There stood the beautiful creature before my eyes. There was no deception in that—there could be none—no scheme could have contrived a contingency so remarkable.

Ijurra might easily have known of the expedition without *her* agency. Its result he would have learned from the returned vaqueros. He had time enough then to collect his band, and set after me. Perhaps she even knew not that he was a leader of guerrilleros? I had heard that his movements were shrouded

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in mystery—that mystery which covers the designs of the adventurer. He had served in the school of Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna—fit master of deception. Isolina might be innocent even of the knowledge of his acts.

I re-read Isolina's letter, weighing every word. Strange epistle, but natural to the spirit that had dictated it. In its pages I could trace no evidence of treason. No; Isolina was loyal—she was true!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ELIJAH QUACKENBOSS.

While these reflections were passing through my mind, I was standing, or rather leaning, with my back against the boulder, and my face towards the wall of the mesa. Directly in front of me was a recess or indentation in the cliff, carried groove-like upward, and deepening as it approached the summit. It was a slight gorge or furrow, evidently formed by the attrition of water, and probably the conduit of the rain that fell upon the table surface of the mound.

Though the cliffs on each side were perfectly vertical, the gorge had a considerable inclination; and the instant my eyes rested upon it, it occurred to me that the precipice at this point could be scaled!

Up to this moment, I had not thought of such a thing; for I had been under the impression—from what my companions had told me—that the summit of the mesa was inaccessible.

Rousing myself to more energetic observation, I scrutinized the cliff from base to summit; and the more I regarded it, the stronger grew my conviction that, without great difficulty, an

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a nice climber might reach the top. There were knob-like protuberances on the rock that would serve as footholds, and here and there, small bushes of the trailing cedar hung out from the seams, that would materially assist any one making the ascent

While scanning these peculiarities, I was startled by observing several abrasions on the face of the rock. These marks appeared quite fresh, and evidently made by some other agency than that of the elements.

After a short examination, I became convinced that they were marks made by a human foot—the scratches of a strong-soled shoe. Beyond a doubt, *the cliff had been scaled!*

My first impulse was to communicate the discovery to my companions; but I forebore for a while—in order to satisfy myself that the person who had made this daring attempt had actually succeeded in reaching the summit.

Twilight was on, and I could get only an indistinct view of the gorge at its upper part, but I saw enough to convince me that the attempt had been successful.

What bold fellow had ventured this? and with what object? were the questions I naturally asked myself.

Vague recollections were stirring within me; presently they grew more distinct, and all at once I was able to answer both the interrogatories I had put. I knew the man who had climbed that cliff. I only wondered I had not thought of him before!

Among the many odd characters in the piebald band, of which I had the honour to be chief, not the least odd was one who answered to the euphonious name of "Elijah Quackenboss." He was a mixture of Yankee and German, originating somewhere in the mountains of Pennsylvania. He had been a schoolmaster among his native hills—had picked up some little book-learning; but what rendered him more interesting to me was the fact that he was a botanist. Not a very scientific one, it is true; but in whatever way obtained, he possessed a respectable knowledge of *flora* and *sylvia*, and evinced an aptitude for the study not infe

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rior to Linnæus himself. The more surprising was this, that such inclinations are somewhat rare among Americans—but Quackenboss no doubt drew his instincts from his Teutonic ancestry.

If his intellectual disposition was odd, not less so was his physical. His person was tall, crooked, and lanky; and none of those members that should have been counterparts of each other seemed exactly to match. His arms were odd ones—his limbs unlike; and all four looked as if they had met by accident, and could not agree upon anything; his eyes were no better mated, and never consented to look in the same direction; but with the right one, Elijah Quackenboss could "sight" a rifle, and drive in a nail at a hundred yards' distance.

From his odd habits his companions—the rangers—regarded him as hardly "square;" but this idea was partially derived from seeing him engaged in his botanical researches—an occupation that to them appeared simply absurd. They knew, however, that "Dutch Lige"—such was his sobriquet—could shoot "plum centre;" and notwithstanding his quiet demeanor, had proved himself "good stuff at the bottom;" and this shielded him from the ridicule he would otherwise have experienced at their hands.

Than Quackenboss, a more ardent student of botany I never saw. No labor retarded him in the pursuit. No matter how wearied with drill or other duties, the moment the hours became his own, he would be off in search of rare plants, wandering far from camp, and at times placing himself in situations of extreme danger. Since his arrival on Texan ground, he had devoted much attention to the study of the *cactaceæ*, and now having reached Mexico, the home of these singular endogens, he might be said to have gone cactus-mad. Every day his researches disclosed to him new forms of cactus or cereus, and it was in connection with one of these that he was now recalled to my memory. I remember his having told me—for a similarity of tastes frequently brought us into conversation—of his having discovered, but a

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few days before, a new and singular species of *mamillaria.* He had found it growing upon a *prarie mound* which he had climbed for the purpose of exploring its botany, adding at the same time that he had observed the species only upon the top of this mound, and nowhere else in the surrounding country.

This mound was our mesa. It had been climbed by Elijah Quackenboss!

If he, awkward animal that he was, had been able to scale the height, why could not *we*?

This was my reflection; and without staying to consider what advantage we should derive from such a proceeding, I communicated the discovery to my companions.

Both appeared delighted, and after a short scrutiny, declared the path practicable. Garey believed he could easily go up; and Rube in his terse way said, that his "jeints wa'nt so stiff yet;" only a month ago he had "clomb a wuss-looking bluff than it."

But now the reflection occurred, to what purpose should we make the ascent? We could not escape in that way! There was no chance of our being able to descend upon the other side, for there the cliff was impracticable. The behavior of the guerrilleros had given proof of this. Some time before, Ijurra, with another, had gone to the rear of the mound, evidently to reconnoitre it, in hopes of being able to assail us from behind. But they had returned and their gestures betokened their disappointment.

Why, then, should we ascend, if we could not also descend on the opposite side? True upon the summit we should be perfectly safe from an attack of the guerrilla, but not from *thirst*, and this was the enemy we now dreaded. Water would not be found on the top of the mesa. It could not better our situation to go there; on the contrary, we should be in a worse "fix" than ever. So said Garey. Where we were, we had our horses—a spare one to eat when that became necessary, and

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the others to aid us in our attempt to escape. Should we climb the cliff, these must be left behind. From the top was less than fifty yards, and our rifles would still cover them from the clutch of our enemies, but to what advantage? Like ourselves, they must in time fall before thirst and hunger.

The gleam of hope died within us, as suddenly as it had sprung up.

It could in nowise serve us to scale the cliff: we were better in our present position; we could hold that so long as thirst would allow us. We could not do more within the granite walls of an impregnable fortress.

This was the conclusion at which Garey and I had simultaneously arrived.

Rube had not yet expressed himself. The old man was standing with both hands clutching his long rifle, the butt of which rested upon the ground. He held the piece near the muzzle, partially leaning upon it, while he appeared gazing intently into the barrel. This was one of his "ways" when endeavoring to unravel a knotty question; and Garey and I, knowing this peculiarity on the part of the old trapper, remained silent—leaving him to the free development of his "instincts."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE TRAP EMPTY.

For several minutes Rube preserved his meditative attitude, without uttering a word or making the slightest motion. At length, a low but cheerful whistle escaped his lips, and at the same time his body became erect.

"Eh? what is't, old boy?" inquired Garey, who understood the signal, and knew that the whistle denoted some discovery.

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Rube's reply was the interrogatory: "How long's yur trail-rope, Bill?"

"It are twenty yards—good mizyure," answered Garey.

"An yurs, young fellur?"

"About the same length—perhaps a yard or two more."

"Good!" ejaculated the questioner, with a satisfied look. "we'll fool them niggurs yit—*we* will!"

"Hooraw for you, old boy! you've hit on some plan, hain't you?" This was Garey's interrogatory.

"Sartintly, I hez."

"Let's have it then, kummarade," said Garey, seeing that Rube had relapsed into silence; "their ain't much time to think o' things——"

"Plenty o' time, Billee! Don't be so durned impatient boy! Thur's gobs o' time. I'll stake my ole mar agin the young fellur's black hoss, thet we'll be out o' this scrape afore sunup. Geehosophat! how thu'll cuss when they finds the trap empy. He, he, he—ho, ho, hoo!"

And the old sinner continued to laugh for some seconds, as coolly and cheerfully as if no enemy was within a thousand miles of the spot.

Garey and I were chafing with impatience, but we knew that our comrade was in one of his queer moods, and it was no use attempting to push him faster than he was disposed to go.

When his chuckling fit was ended, he assumed a more serious air, and once more appeared to busy himself with the calculation of some problem. He spoke in soliloquy.

"Twenty yurds o' Bill's," muttered he, "an twenty o' the young fellur's ur forty; an myen—it ur sixteen yurds—make the hul fifty an six; ye-es, fifty-six preezactly. Then thur's the knots to come off o' thet, though fornenst 'em thur's bridles Wagh! thur's rope aplenty, an enough over, to string up half a score o' them yeller-bellies, ef ever I gits holten 'em And won't I? Wagh!"

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During this arithmetical process, Rube, instead of gazing any longer into the barrel of his rifle, had kept his eyes wandering up and down the cliff. Before he had ceased talking, both Garey and myself had divined his plan, but we refrained from telling him so. To have anticipated the old trapper in his disclosure would have been a mortal offence.

We waited for him to make it known.

"Now, boyes!" said he at length, "hyur's how we'll git clur. Fust an fo'must, we'll crawl up yander, soon's it gits dark enough to kiver us. Seconds, we'll toat our trail-ropes along wi' us. Thuds, we'll jine the three thegither, an ef thet ain't long enough, a kupple o' bridles 'ill help out. Fo'th, we'll tie the eend o' the rope to a sapling up thur on top, an then slide down the bluff on t'other side, do ee see? Fift, oncest down on the prairie, we'll put straight for the settlements. Sixt an lastest, when we gits thur, we'll gather a wheen o' the young fellur's rangers, take a bee-line back to the mound, an gie these hyur niggurs such a lambaystin as they hain't hed since the war begun. Now?"

"Now" meant, what think you of the plan? Mentally, both Garey and I had already approved of it, and we promptly signified our approval. It really promised well. Should we succeed in carrying out the details without being detected, it was probable enough that within a few hours we might be safe in the plaza of the rancheria, and quenching our thirst at its crystal well

The anticipated pleasure filled us with fresh energy; and we set about putting everything in readiness. One watched, while the other two worked. Our lazoes were knotted together, and the four horses fastened head to head with their bridles, and secured in so as to keep them behind the boulder. This done, we awaited the falling of night.

Would it be a dark night? About this we now felt anxious It was already closing down and gave promise of favoring us; a layer of lead-colored clouds covered the sky, and we knew there could be no moon before midnight.

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Rube, who boasted he could read weather-sign like a "salt-sea sailor," scrutinized the sky.

"Wal, old hoss!" interrogated Garey, "what do ye think o't? Will it be dark, eh?"

"Black as a bar!" muttered Rube in reply; and then, as if not satisfied with the simile, he added: "Black as the inside o' a buffler bull's belly on a burnt paraira!"

The old trapper laughed heartily at the ludicrous conceit, and Garey and I could not refrain from joining in the laugh. The guerrilleros must have heard us; they must have deemed us mad!

Rube's prognostication proved correct; the night came down dark and lowering. The leaden layer broke up into black cumulus clouds, that slowly careered across the canopy of the sky. A storm portended; and already some big drops, that shot vertically downward, could be heard plashing heavily upon our saddles. All this was to our satisfaction; but at that moment a flash of lightning illumined the whole arch of the heavens, lighting the prairie as with a thousand torches. It was none of the pale lavender-colored light, seen in northern climes, but a brilliant blaze, that appeared to pervade all space, and almost rivalled the brightness of day

Its sudden and unexpected appearance filled us with dismay: we recognized in it an obstacle to our designs.

"Durn the tarnal thing!" exclaimed Rube, peevishly. "It ur wuss than a moon, durn it!"

"Is it goin to be the quick-forky, or the long-blazey?" inquired Garey, with a reference to two distinct modes in which, upon these southern prairies, the electric fluid exhibits itself.

In the former, the flashes are quick and short-lived, and th intervals of darkness also of short duration. Bolts pierce the clouds in straight, lance-like shafts, or forking and zigzag, followed by thunder in loud unequal bursts, and dashes of intermittent rain

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The other is very distinct from this; there are no shafts or bolts, but a steady blaze which fills the whole firmament with a white quivering light, lasting many seconds of time, and followed by long intervals of amorphous darkness. Such lightning is rarely accompanied by thunder, and rain is not always its concomitant, though it was this sort we now witnessed, and raindrops were falling.

"Quick-forky!" echoed Rube, in reply to his comrade's interrogatory; "no—dod rot it! not so bad as thet. It ur the blazey. Thur's no thunder, dont'ee see? Wal! we must grope our way up atween the glimps."

I understood why Rube preferred the "blazey;" the long intervals of darkness between the flashes might enable us to carry out our plan.

He had scarcely finished speaking, when the lightning gleamed a second time, and the prairie was lit up like a theatre during the grand scene in a spectacle. We could see the guerrilleros standing by their horses, in cordon across the plain; we could distinguish their arms and equipments—even the buttons upon their jackets! With their faces rendered ghastly under the glare, and their bodies magnified to gigantic proportions, they presented to our eyes a wild and spectral appearance.

With the flash there was no thunder—neither the close quick clap, nor the distant rumble. There was perfect silence, which rendered the scene more awfully impressive.

"All right!" muttered Rube, as he saw that the besiegers still kept their places. "We must jest grope our way up atween the glimps; but fust let 'em see we're still hyur."

We protruded our faces and rifles around the rock, and in this position awaited another flash.

It came, bright as before; the enemy could not fail to have noticed us.

Our programme was already prepared: Garey was to ascend first, and take up the rope. He only waited for the termination

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of another blaze. One end of the lazo was fastened round his waist, and the rope hung down behind him.

When the light gleamed again, he was ready; and the moment went out, he glided forward to the cliff, and commenced his ascent.

O, for a long interval of darkness!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

SCALING THE CLIFF.

O FOR a long interval of darkness!

Our hearts beat anxiously—at least I can answer for my own. Rube watched the guerrilleros, permitting his head to be seen by them. My eyes were bent upon the rocky wall, but through the thick darkness I looked in vain for our comrade. I listened to hear how he was progressing: I could distinguish a slight scratching against the cliff, each moment higher and farther away; but Garey climbed with a moccasined foot, and the noise was too faint to reach the ears of our enemies. O for a long interval of darkness!

It appeared a long one: perhaps it was not five minutes, but it *felt* twice that, before the lightning again blazed forth. With the flash, I ran my eyes up the precipitous wall. O God! Garey was still upon its face, scarcely midway up. He was standing on a ledge—his body flattened against the rock—and with his arms extended horizontally, he presented the appearance of a man crucified upon the cliff! So long as the glare lasted, he remained in this attitude, motionless as the rock itself.

I turned with anxious look toward the guerrilleros. I heard

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no voice; I observed no movement. Thank Heaven! they saw him not!

Near where he was resting, some bushes of the trailing cedar grew out of the cliff; their dark foliage mottled its white face, rendering the form of the climber less conspicuous.

Another long spell of darkness, another blaze of light.

I scanned the gorge: no human form was visible. I saw a dark line that, like a crack, vertically intersected the cliff from parapet to base: it was the rope Garey had carried up. He had reached the summit in safety!

It was my turn next—for Rube insisted on retaining the post of danger—and with my rifle slung on my back, I stood ready. I had given the parting whisper to my brave steed, and pressed his velvet muzzle to my cheek. With the last flicker of the electric gleam, I seized the hanging lazo, and drew myself upward.

I had confidence in the rope. I knew it was fastened above, or safe in the strong grasp of Garey. With its aid the ascent was rendered easy. I experienced no difficulty in climbing from ledge to ledge, and before the light came again, I had reached the crest of the cliff.

We lay flat among the bushes that grew by the very brink, scarcely showing our faces to the front.

I saw that the rope had been fastened round the trunk of a small tree. Presently we perceived by its jerking that Rube had begun his ascent. Shortly after, we could hear him sprawling and scratching upward, and then his thin dark form loomed over the edge of the cliff, and dead beat for breath, he staggered silently into the bushes beside us. Even in the darkness, I noticed something peculiar in his appearance! his head looked smaller, but I had no time to question him.

We waited only for another glance at the guerrilleros; they were still at their posts, evidently unconscious of our movements. Rube's catskin cap, cunningly adjusted upon the boulder, satisfied them that we were still at ours; and explained, moreover,

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the oddness I had observed about the upper story of the trapper.

Rube had now recovered wind; and gathering up the rope, we stole away over the table-summit to search for a place of descent.

On reaching the opposite side, we at once found what we wanted—a tree near the edge of the cliff. Many small pines grew upon the escarpment; and selecting one, we knotted the rope securely around its trunk.

There was yet much to be done before any of us could attempt the descent. We knew that the cliff was more than a hundred feet in vertical height, and to glide down a rope of that length is a trying feat, worthy the most expert of tars. None of us might be able to accomplish it: the first could be lowered down easily enough, and this was our intention; so might the second; but the other would have to glide down the rope.

We were not long delayed by the contemplation of this obstacle: my comrades were men of quick thought; and a plan to lessen the difficulty soon suggested itself. Their knives were out in a trice: a sapling was procured, and cut into short pieces; these were notched, and tied at intervals along the rope. Our "Jacob's ladder" was ready.

It still remained to make sure that the rope was of sufficient length. The knots had somewhat shortened it; but this point was soon settled with like ingenuity. A small stone was tied to one end, and then dropped over the cliff. We listened: we heard the dull "thump" of the stone upon the prairie turf. The rope therefore reached to the ground.

It was again drawn up, the stone taken out, and the noose fastened around the body of Rube, under his armpits. He was lightest, and for this reason had been chosen to make the first descent, as he would least try the strength of the rope—still a doubtful point. The ascent had not proved it—for in climbing up, but one-half of our weight had been upon it, our feet resting either

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against the cliff, or upon its ledges. On reaching the plain Rube was to submit the rope to trial, before either Garey or I should attempt to go down. This he was to do by adding a large stone to his own weight--making both at least eqnal to that of Garey, who was by far the heaviest of the party.

All being arranged, the old trapper slid silently over the edge of the cliff--Garey and I giving out the rope slowly, and with caution. Foot by foot, and yard by yard, it was drawn through our hands by the weight of the descending body, now lost to our sight over the brow of the cliff.

Still slowly, and with caution, we allowed the lazo to pass, taking care that it should glide gradually, so as not to jerk, and cause the body of our comrade to vibrate with too much violence against the rocks.

We were both seated close together, our faces turned to the plain. More than three-quarters of the rope had passed from us, and we were congratulating ourselves that the trial would soon be over, when to our dismay, the strain ceased with a suddenness that caused both of us to recoil upon our backs! At the same instant, we heard the "twang" of the snapping rope, followed by a sharp cry from below!

We sprang to our feet, and mechanically recommenced hauling upon the rope. The weight was no longer upon it; it was light as packthread, and returned to our hands without effort.

Desisting, we fronted to each other, but not for an explanation. Neither required it; neither uttered a word. The case was clear: the rope had broken; our comrade had been hurled to the earth!

With a simultaneous impulse, we dropped upon our knees; and, crawling forward to the brink of the precipice, looked over and downward. We could see nothing in the dark abysm that frowned below; and we waited till the light should break forth again.

We listened with ears keenly set. Was it a groan we heard?

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a cry of agony? No; its repetition told us what it was—the howl of the prairie wolf. No human voice reached our ears Alas, no! Even a cry of pain would have been welcome, since it would have told us our comrade still lived. But no, he was silent—dead—perhaps broken to atoms!

It was long ere the lightning gleamed again. Before it did, we heard voices. They came from the bottom of the cliff directly under us; but there were two, and neither was the voice of the trapper. It is easy to distinguish the full intonation of the Saxon from the shrill treble of the sons of Anahuac. The voices were those of our foes.

Presently the light discovered them to us. Two there were. They were on horseback, moving on the plain below, and close in to the cliff. We saw them distinctly, but we saw not what we had expected—the mangled body of our comrade! The gleam, long continued, had given us full time to scrutinize the ground. We could have distinguished upon it any object as large as a cat. Rube, living or dead, was certainly not there!

Had he fallen into the hands of the guerrilla? The two we saw carried lances, but no prisoner. It was not likely they had captured him; besides, we knew that Rube, unless badly crippled, would never have surrendered without a struggle, and neither shot nor shout had been heard.

We were soon relieved from all uneasiness on this score. The brigands continued their conversation, and the light breeze wafted their voice upwards, so that we could distinguish part of what was said.

"Carrambo!" exclaimed one impatiently; "you must have been mistaken? It was the coyoté you heard."

"Captain! I am confident it was a man's voice."

"Then it must have proceeded from one of the *picarros* behind the rock. There is no one out here? But come! let us return by the other side of the mesa—*vamos!*"

The hoof-stroke admonished us that they were passing onward

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to carry out the design of the last speaker, who was no other than Ijurra himself.

It was a relief to know that our comrade had not yet fallen into their clutches. How far he was injured, we could not have an idea. The rope had given way close to the top, and Rube had carried most of it down with him. In the confusion, we had not noticed how much remained, *behind* our hands, when he fell; and now we could only guess. Seeing that he had disappeared from the spot, we were in high hope that he had sustained no serious injury.

But whither had he gone? Had he but *crawled* away, and was yet in the neighborhood of the mesa? If so, they might light upon him. Hiding-place there was none, either by the base of the cliff or on the surrounding plain.

Garey and I were anxious about the result—the more so, that the guerrilleros had heard his cry, and were in search of him. He might easily be found in such a naked spot.

We hastily formed the determination to cross the table summit to the other side, and watch the movements of the two horsemen.

Guided by their voices, we once more knelt above them, at the rearmost angle of the mound. They had there halted to examine the ground, and only waited for the flash; we, too, waited above them, and *within range.*

"We kin fetch them out o' thar saddles?" whispered my companion.

I hesitated to give my assent; perhaps it was prudence that restrained me, for I had now conceived hopes of a surer deliverance.

At that moment gleamed the lightning; the dark horsemen loomed large under its yellow glare; they were less than fifty paces from the muzzles of our guns: we could have sighted them with sure aim; and, bayed as we had been, I was almost tempted to yield to the solicitations of my companion.

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Just then, an object came under our eyes that caused both of us to draw back our half-levelled rifles—that object was the body of our comrade Rube. It was lying flat upon the ground, the arms and legs stretched out to their full extent, and the face buried deep in the grass. From the elevation at which we viewed it, it appeared like the hide of a young buffalo spread out to dry, and pinned tightly to the turf. But we knew it was not that; we knew it was the body of a man dressed in brown buckskin—the body of the earless trapper! It was not dead either; no dead body could have placed itself in such an attitude, for it lay flattened along the turf like a gigantic newt

The object of this attitude was evident to us, and our hearts beat with a painful anxiety while the light flickered around The body was scarcely five hundred yards out; but though perfectly visible from our position, it must have been inconspicuous to the horsemen below; for as soon as it darkened, we heard them, to our great relief, ride back toward the front, Ijurra reiterating his doubts as they passed away. Fortunate it was for both him and his companion they had not espied that prostrate form—fortunate for Rube—for all of us!

Garey and I kept our places, and waited for another flash When it came, the brown buckskin was no longer in sight! Far off—nearly a mile off, we fancied we could distinguish the same form flattened out as before; but the gleam of the prairie grass rendered our vision uncertain.

Of one thing, however, we were certain—our comrade had escaped

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CHAPTER XI.

A REINFORCEMENT.

For the first time, since encountering the guerrilla, I breathed freely, and felt confident we should get free. My comrade shared my relief; and it is needless to say that we recrossed the summit of the mesa with lighter hearts and step more buoyant.

Of course we no longer speculated about making the descent; with the fragment of rope left, that was impossible. We were simply returning to the front, to keep an eye upon the guerrilleros, and, if possible prevent them from approaching our horses—should they by any chance discover that we had retreated from our position behind the rock.

We were the more anxious about our horses, now that we had less apprehension for ourselves; at least I can answer for myself, and the explanation is easy. So long as I felt the probability that every moment might be the last of my life, the fate of Moro and the white steed was but a secondary consideration. Now that I felt certain I should survive this perilous escapade, the future once more urged its claims; and I was anxious not only to preserve my own steed, but the beautiful creature that had led me into all this peril, but whose capture still promised its rich reward.

That all danger was past—that in a few hours we should be free, was the full belief both of my companion and myself. Perhaps you may not comprehend from what *data* we drew so confident and comfortable a conclusion, though our reasoning was simple enough. We knew that Rube would reach the ranchería, and return with a rescue—that was all.

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'Tis true we were not without *some* anxiety. The rangers might no longer be there?—the army might have marched?—perhaps the picket was withdrawn? Rube himself be might intercepted, or slain?

The last hypothesis gave us least concern. We had full trust in the trapper's ability to penetrate to the American camp—to the enemy's, if necessary. We had just been favored with a specimen of his skill. Whether the army had advanced or not, Rube would reach it before morning, if he should have to steal a horse upon the way. He would soon find the rangers; and, even without orders, Hollingsworth would *lend* him a few—half a dozen of them would be enough. In the worst view of the case, there were stragglers enough about the camp—odd birds, that could easily be enlisted for such a duty. We had scarcely a doubt that our comrade would come back with a rescue.

As to the time, we were left to conjectures. It might be before morning's light—it might not be before late in the following day, or even the night after. But that was a consideration that now weighed lightly. We could hold our aërial fortress for a week—a month—ay, far longer, and against hundreds. We could not be assailed. With our rifles to guard the cliff, no storming-party could approach—no forlorn-hope could scale our battlements!

But what of thirst and hunger, you will ask? Ha! we dreaded not either. Fortune's favors had fallen upon us in showers. Even on that lone summit, we found the means to assuage the one and satisfy the other!

In crossing the table-top, we stumbled upon huge *echinocacti*, that grew over the ground like ant-hills or gigantic bee-hives. They were the *mammillaria* of Quackenboss—dome-shaped, and some of them ten feet in diameter. Garey's knife was out in a trice; a portion of the spinous coat of the largest was stripped off, its top truncated, and a bowl scooped in the soft, succulent

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mass. In another minute, we had assuaged our thirst from this vegetable fountain of the Desert.

With similar facility were we enabled to gratify the kindred appetite. As I had conjectured, on viewing them from the plain, the trees of light-green foliage were "piñon"—the "nut-pine" (*Pinus edulis*), of which there are several species in Northern Mexico, whose cones contain seeds edible and nutritious. A few handfuls of these we gathered, and hungered no more. They would have been better roasted, but at that moment we were contented to eat them raw.

No wonder, then, that with such a supply for the present, and such hopes for the future, we no longer dreaded the impotent fury of our foes.

We lay down at the top of the gorge to watch their further movements, and cover our horses from their attack. The flash of the lightning showed them still on guard, just as we had left them. One of each file was mounted, while his companion, on foot, paced to and fro in the intervals of the cordon. Their measures were cunningly taken; they were evidently determined we should not steal past them in the darkness!

The lightning began to abate, and the intervals between the flashes became longer and longer.

During one of these intervals, we were startled by the sound of hoof-strokes at some distance off; it was the tramp of horses upon the hard plain. There is a difference between the hoof-stroke of a ridden horse and one that is riderless, and the prairie man is rarely puzzled to distinguish them. My companion at once pronounced the horses to be "mounted."

The guerilleros, on the alert, had heard them at the same time as we, and two of them now galloped out to reconnoitre. This we ascertained only by *hearing*, for we could not distinguish an object six feet from our faces—the darkness was almost palpable to the touch.

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The sounds came from a considerable distance, but we could tell that the horsemen were advancing toward the mesa.

We drew no hope from this advent. Rube could not yet have even reached the rancheria. The new-comers were El Zorro and his companion on their return.

We were not kept long in doubt; the horsemen approached and shouts and salutations were exchanged between them and the guerrilleros, while the horses of both parties neighed in response, as if they knew each other.

At this moment the lightning shone again, and to our surprise we perceived not only El Zorro but a reinforcement of full thirty men! The trampling of many hoofs had half-prepared us for this discovery.

It was not without feelings of alarm that we beheld this accession to the enemy's strength. Surely they would no longer hesitate to assail our fortress behind the rock? At least our horses would be captured? Besides, Rube's rescue might be too weak for such a force? There were nearly fifty.

Our anxiety as to the first two points was soon at an end. To our astonishment, we perceived that no assault was to be made as yet. We saw them increase the strength of their cordon of sentries, and make other dispositions to carry on the siege. Evidently they regarded us as hunters do the grizzly bear, the lion, or tiger—not to be attacked in our lair. They dreaded the havoc which they well knew would be made by our rifles and revolvers; and they determined to reduce us by starvation. On no other principle could we account for the cowardly continence of their revenge.

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CHAPTER XLI

THE INDIAN SPY.

It was past the hour of midnight. The lightning, that for some time had appeared only at long intervals, now ceased altogether. Its fitful glare gave place to a softer, steadier light, for the moon had arisen, and was climbing up the eastern sky. Cumulus clouds still hung in the heavens, slowly floating across the canopy; but their masses were detached, and the azure firmament was visible through the spaces between. The beautiful planet Venus, and here and there a solitary star, twinkled in these blue voids, or gleamed through the filmy bordering of the clouds; but the chiefs of the constellations alone were visible. The moon's disc was clear and well defined, whiter from contrast with the dark cumuli; and her beam frosted the prairie till the grass looked hoar. There was neither mist nor mirage; the electric fluid had purged the atmosphere of its gases, and the air was cool, limpid, and bracing. Though the moon had passed the full, so brilliant was her beam, that an object could have been distinguished far off upon the plain, whose silvery level extended on all sides to the horizon. The thick black clouds, however, moving silently over the sky, occasioned long intervals of eclipse, during which the prairie, as before, was shrouded in sombre darkness.

Up to this time, Garey and I had remained by the head of the little gorge, through which we had ascended. The moon was behind us, for the guerrilla was on the western side of the mesa. The shadow of the mound was thrown far out upon the plain, and just beyond its well-defined edge was the line of scuti-

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nels thickly posted On our knees among the low shrubbery, we were unseen by them, while we commanded a perfect view of the whole troop, as they smoked, chattered, shouted, and sang —for they gave such tokens of their jovial humor.

After quietly watching them for some time, Garey left me to take a turn round the summit, and reconnoitre the opposite or eastern side. In that direction lay the rancheria; and if the picket was still stationed there, we might soon expect the rescue. My rangers were not the men to tarry, called forth on such a purpose; and under Rube's guidance, they would be most likely to make their approach by the rear of the mound. Garey, therefore, went in that direction to make his reconnoissance.

He had not parted from me more than a minute, when a dark object out upon the plain attracted my glance. I fancied it was the figure of a man; it was prostrate and flattened against the ground, just as Old Rube had appeared when making his escape! Surely it was not he? I had but an indistinct view of it, for it was full six hundred yards from the mesa, and directly beyond the line of the guerrilleros. Just then a cloud crossing the moon's disc, shrouded the plain, and the dark object was no more visible.

I kept my eyes fixed on the spot, and waited for the returning light. When the cloud passed, the figure was no longer where I had first noticed it; but nearer to the horsemen I perceived the same object, and in the same attitude as before! It was now within less than two hundred yards of the Mexican line, but a bunch of tufted grass appeared to shelter it from the eyes of the guerrilleros, as none of them gave any sign that it was perceived by them. From my elevated position, the grass did not conceal it. I had a clear view of the figure, and was certain it was the body of a man, and, still more, of a *naked* man, for it glistened under the sheen of the moonlight, as only a naked body would have done.

Up to this time I had fancied, or rather *feared*, it might be

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Rube. I say feared—for I had no wish to see Rube, upon his return, present himself in that fashion Surely he would not come back alone? And why should he be thus playing the spy, since he already knew the exact position of our enemy?

The apparition puzzled me, and I was for a while in doubt But the *naked* body reassured me. It could not be Rube. The skin was of a dark hue, but so was that of the old trapper Though born white, the sun, dirt, gunpowder, and grease, with the smoke of many a prairie fire, had altered Rube's complexion to the true copper tint, and in point of colour, he had but little advantage over a full blood Indian. But Rube would not have been naked; he never doffed his buckskins. Besides the oily glitter of that body was not Rube's; his "hide" would not have shone so under the moonlight. No; the prostrate form was not his.

Another cloud cast new shadows; and while these continued, I saw no more of the skulking figure. As the moon again shone forth, I perceived that it was gone from behind the tuft of grass. I scanned the ground in the immediate neighborhood. It was not to be seen; but on looking further out I could just distinguish the figure of a man, bent forward and rapidly gliding away. I followed it with my eyes until it disappeared in the distance, as though it had melted into the moonlight.

While gazing intently over the distant plain in the direction whence the figure had retreated, I was startled at beholding not one, but many forms, dimly outlined upon the prairie edge.

"It *was* Rube," thought I; "and yonder are the rangers!"

I strained my eyes to their utmost. They were horsemen beyond a doubt; but, to my astonishment, instead of being close together, one followed another in single file, until a long line was traced against the sky like the links of a gigantic chain. Ex

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cept in the narrow defile, or the forest-path, my rangers never rode in that fashion. It could not be they!

At this crisis, a new thought came into my mind. More than once in my life had I witnessed a spectacle similar to that now under my eyes—more than once had I looked upon it with dread. That serried line was an old acquaintance: it was a band of Indian warriors on their midnight march—upon the war-trail!

The actions of the spy were explained; he was an Indian runner. The party to whom he belonged was about to approach the mesa—perhaps with the design of encamping there—he had been sent forward to reconnoitre the ground.

What effect his tale would have, I could not guess. I could see that the horsemen were halted—perhaps awaiting the return of their messenger. They were too distant to be seen by the Mexicans; and the minute after they were also invisible to my eyes upon the darkly shadowed prairie.

Before communicating with Garey, I resolved to wait for another gleam of moonlight, so that I might have a more distinct story to tell.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CABALLADA.

It was nearly a quarter of an hour before the cloud moved away; and then, to my surprise, I saw a clump of horses—not *horsemen*—upon the prairie, and scarcely half a mile distant from the mesa! Not one of them was mounted and, to all appearance, it was a drove of wild-horses that had galloped up during the interval of darkness, and were now standing silent and motionless.

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I strained my eyes upon the distant prairie, but the dim horse men were no longer to be seen. They must have ridden off beyond the range of vision?

I was about to seek my comrade and communicate to him what had passed, when on rising, to my feet, I found him standing by my side. He had been all around the summit without seeing aught, and had returned to satisfy himself that the guerrilla was still quiet.

"Hillow!" he exclaimed, as his eyes fell upon the *caballada*. "What the darnation's yonder, a drove o' wild hosses? It's mighty strange them niggers don't notice 'em! By the etarnal——"

I know not what Garey meant to have said. His words were drowned by the wild yell that broke simultaneously from the Mexican line; and the next moment the whole troop were seen springing to their saddles, and putting themselves in motion.

We, of course, supposed they had just discovered the caballada of wild horses, and it was that that was producing this sudden stampede. What was our astonishment on perceiving that we ourselves were the cause of the alarm; for the guerrilleros instead of fronting to the plain, rode closer up to the cliff, and screaming wildly, fired their carbines at *us!* Among the rest we could distinguish the great gun of El Zorro, and the hiss of its leaden bullet, as it passed close to our ears!

We were puzzled at first to know how they had discovered us. A glance explained that the moon had risen higher in the heavens, and the shadow cast by the mound had been gradually foreshortened. While gazing out at the caballada, we had incautiously kept our feet, and our figures, magnified to gigantic proportions, were thrown forward upon the plain directly under the eyes of our enemies. They had but to look up to see us where we stood.

Instantly we knelt down among the bushes, clutching our rifles. The surprise occasioned by our appearance upon the cliff, seemed

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to have deprived our enemies, for the moment, of their habitual prudence, as several of them rode boldly within range. Perhaps they were some of the late arrivals. In the dark shadow we could not make out their forms; but one had the misfortune to be mounted on a white horse, and that guided the trapper's aim. I saw him glancing along his barrel, and heard the sharp crack. I fancied I heard a stifled groan from below, and the next moment the white horse was seen galloping out into the moonlight, but the rider was no longer upon his back.

Another cloud passed over the moon, and the plain was again shrouded from our sight. Garey was proceeding to reload, when a cry arose amidst the darkness, that caused him to pause and listen. The cry was again repeated, and then uttered continuously with that wild intonation which can alone proceed from the throat of the savage. It was not the guerrilla that was uttering that cry; it was the yell of the Indian warrior.

"Comanche war-hoop!" cried Garey, after listening a moment. "Comanche war-hoop? by the eternal! Hooraw! the Injuns are upon 'em!"

Amidst the cries, we could hear the rapid trampling of horses, and the ground appeared to vibrate under the quick heavy tread. Each moment the strokes sounded nearer. The savages were charging the guerrilla!

The moon shot forth from the cloud. There was no longer a doubt. The wild-horses were mounted; each carried an Indian naked to the waist, his painted body glaring red in the moonlight, and terrible to behold.

By this time the Mexicans had all mounted and faced towards the unexpected foe, but with evident signs of irresolution in their ranks. They would never stand the charge—no, never So said Garey and he was right.

The savages had advanced within less than a hundred paces of the Mexican line, when they were observed to pull suddenly up. It was but a momentary halt—just time enough to enable

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them to mark the formation of their foes, and send a flight of arrows into their midst. That done, they dashed onward, uttering their wild yells and brandishing their long spears.

The guerrilleros only waited to discharge their carbines and escopettes; they did not think of reloading. Most of them flung away their guns as soon as they had fired, and the retreat began. The whole troop turned its back upon the enemy, and spurring their horses to a gallop, came sweeping round the base of the mesa in headlong flight.

The Indians, uttering their demoniac yells, followed as fast. They were rendered more furious that their hated foe was likely to escape them. The latter were indebted to us for having put them upon the alert. But for that circumstance, the Indians would have charged them while dismounted, and far different might have been their fate. Mounted and ready for flight, most of them would probably get clear.

The moment we saw the direction the chase was about to take Garey and I rushed across the summit to that side. From the brow of the precipice, our view was perfect, and we could see both parties as they passed along its base directly below us. Both were riding in straggling clumps, and scarcely two hundred paces separated the rearmost of the pursued from the leadmost of the pursuers. The latter still uttered their war-cry while the former now rode in silence—their breath bound, and their voices hushed in the deathlike stillness of terror.

All at once a cry arose from the guerrilla—short, quick, and despairing—the voice of some new consternation; at the same moment, the whole troop were seen to pull up.

We looked for the cause of this extraordinary conduct: our eyes and our ears both guided us to the explanation. From the opposite direction, and scarcely three hundred yards distant, appeared a band of horsemen coming up at a gallop. They were right in the moon's eye, and we could see waving arms, and hear loud voices. The hoofs could be heard pounding the

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prairie, and my companion and I recognized the heavy tread o the American horse. Still more certain were we about that boarse "hurrah." Neither Indian nor Mexican could have uttered that well-known shout.

"Hooraw!—the rangers!" cried Garey, as he echoed the cry at the full pitch of his voice.

The guerrilleros, stupefied by surprise at sight of this new enemy, had paused for a moment—no doubt fancying it was another party of Indians. Their halt was of short duration; the dim light favoured them; rifles already played upon their ranks; and suddenly wheeling to the left, they struck out into the open plain.

The Indians, seeing them turn off, leaned into the diagonal line to intercept them; but the rangers, already close up, had just made a similar movement, and savage and Saxon were now obliquing towards each other.

The moon that for some minutes had been yielding but a faint light, became suddenly eclipsed by a cloud, and the darkness was now greater than ever. Garey and I saw no more of the strife; but we heard the shock of the opposing bands; we heard the war-whoop of the savage mingling with the rangers' vengeful shout; we heard the "crack, crack, crack," of yäger rifles, and the quick detonations of revolvers—the clashing of sabre-blades upon spear shafts—the ring of breaking steel—the neighing of steeds—the victor's cry of triumph—and the deep anguished groan of the victim.

With anxious hearts, and nerves excited to their utmost, we stood upon the cliff, and listened to these sounds of dread import.

Not long did they last. The fierce struggle was soon over. When the moon gleamed forth again, the battle was ended. Prostrate forms, both of men and horse, were lying upon the plain.

Far to the south, a dark clump was seen disappearing over

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the prairie's edge; it was the cowardly guerrilla. To the west horsemen galloped away alone, or in straggling groups; but the cheer of triumph that reached us from the scene of strife told us who were the masters of the ground. The rangers had triumphed.

"Whur ur ye, Bill?" cried a voice from the bottom of the cliff, which both of us easily recognized.

"Hyar I be," answered Garey.

"Wal, we've gin them Injuns goss, I reck'n; but cuss the luck, the yeller-bellies hev got clur off. Wagh!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

A CHAPTER OF EXPLANATIONS.

The fight could not have lasted more than ten minutes. The whole skirmish had the semblance of a moonlight dream, interrupted by interludes of darkness. So rapid had been the movements of the forces engaged, that after the first fire not a gun was reloaded. As for the guerrilleros, the Indian war-cry seemed to have shaken the pieces out of their hands, for the ground where they had first broken off was literally strewed with carbines, escopettes, and lances. The great gun of El Zorro was found among the spoils.

Notwithstanding the shortness of the affair, it proved sufficiently tragical to both Mexicans and Indians: five of the guerrilleros had bit the dust, and twice that number of savage warriors lay lifeless upon the plain—their bodies glaring under the red war-paint, as if shrouded in blood. The Mexicans lay near the foot of the mesa, having fallen under the first fire of the

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Rangers, delivered as they galloped up. The Indians were further out upon the plain, where they had dropped to the thick rapid detonations of the revolvers, that, so long as the warriors held their ground, played upon them with fearful effect. They may have heard of this weapon, and perhaps have seen a revolver in the hands of some trapper or traveller, but, to my knowledge, it was the first time they had ever encountered a band of men armed with so terrible a power to destroy; for the Rangers were indeed the first military organisation that carried Colt's pistol into battle—the high cost of the arm having deterred the government from extending it to other branches of the service.

Nor did the Rangers themselves come unscathed out of the fight: two had dropped dead out of their saddles, pierced by the Comanche spear; while nearly a dozen were more or less severely wounded by arrows.

While Quackenboss was climbing the cliff, Garey and I found time to talk over the strange incidents to which we had been witness. We were aided by explanations from below, but, without these, we had no difficulty in comprehending all. The Indians were a band of Comanches, as their war-cry had already made known to us. Their arrival on the ground at that moment was purely accidental, so far as we or the Mexicans were concerned; it was a war-party, and upon the war-trail, with the intention of reiving a rich Mexican town on the other side of the Rio Grande, some twenty leagues from the rancheria. Their spy had discovered the horsemen by the mesa, and made them out to be Mexicans—a foe which the lordly Comanche holds in supreme contempt. Not so contemptible in his eyes are Mexican horses, silver-studded saddles, speckled serapés, mangas of fine cloth, bell-buttoned breeches, arms, and accoutrements; and it was to sweep this paraphernalia that the attack had been made; though hereditary hatred of the Spanish race—old as the Conquest—and revenge for more recent wrongs, were of themselves sufficient motives to have impelled the Indians to their hostile

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attempt. All this we learned from one of their braves, who remained wounded upon the ground, and who, upon closer examination, turned out to be a *ci-devant* Mexican captive, now completely Indianised!

Fortunately for the Mexican town, the savages, thus checked, abandoned their design, and return to their mountain fastnesses sadly humbled.

The rest of the affair was still of easier explanation to Garey and myself. Rube, as we conjectured, had arrived safe at the rancheria; and in ten minutes after his story had been told, fifty Rangers, with Holingsworth at their head, rode rapidly for the mesa. Rube had guided them with his usual craft. Like the Indians, they had been moving forward during the intervals of darkness; but, coming in the opposite direction, they had kept the mound between them and their, foe, and, trusting to this advantage, were in hopes of taking the guerrilleros by surprise. They had approached almost within charging distance, when the war-whoop of the savage sounded in their ears, and they were met by the retreating band. Knowing that all who came that way must be enemies, they delivered their fire upon the approaching horsemen, and then galloping forward, found themselves face to face with the painted warriors of the plains. The mutual surprise of Rangers and Indians, caused by the unexpected rencontre, proved a happy circumstance for the cowardly guerrilla, who, during the short halt of their double pursuers, and the confused fight that followed, were enabled to gallop off beyond reach of pursuit.

It was a curious conjecture what would have been the result had the Rangers not arrived on the ground. Certainly the Indians would have rescued us from our not less savage foes. My companion and I might have remained undiscovered, but we should have lost our precious horses. As it was, we were soon once more upon their backs; and, free from all thought of peril now joyfully turned our faces towards the rancheria.

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Wheatley rode by my side. Holingsworth with a party remained upon the ground to collect the "spoils" and bury our unfortunate comrades. As we moved away, I turned, and for a moment gazed back on the scene of strife. I saw Holingsworth dismounted on the plain. He was moving among the bodies of the five guerrilleros; one after another, he turned them over, till the moon glared upon their ghastly features. So odd were his movements, and so earnest did he appear, that one might have fancied him engaged in searching for a fallen friend, or more like some prowling robber intent upon stripping the dead! But neither object was his—on the contrary, he was searching for a foe. He found him not. After scanning the features of all five, he was seen to turn away, and the unconcerned manner in which he moved from the spot, told that he who was sought was not among the slain.

"The news, Wheatley?"

"News, Cap! Grand news, by thunder! It appears we have been barking up the wrong tree—at least so thinks President Polk. They say we can't reach Mexico on this line; so we're all going to be drawn off, and shipped to some port further down the gulf—Vera Cruz, I believe."

"Ah! grand news indeed."

"I don't like it a bit," continued Wheatley; "the less so since it is rumoured that old "Rough and Ready" is to be recalled, and we're to be commanded by that book martinet Scott. It's shabby treatment of Taylor, after what the old vet has accomplished. They're afraid of him setting up for president next go. Hang their politics! It's a confounded shame, by thunder!"

I could partly understand Wheatley's reluctance to be ordered upon the new line of operations. The gay lieutenant was never troubled with ennui; his leisure hours he contrived to pass pleasantly enough in company with Conchita, the plump, dark-eyed daughter of the alcaldé; more than once, I had unwittingly interrupted them in their amorous dalliance. The rancheria, with

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its mud huts and dusty lanes, in the eyes of the Texan, was a city of gilded palaces, its streets paved with gold. It was Wheatley's heaven, and Conchita was the angel who inhabited it. Little as either he or I had liked the post at first, neither of us desired a charge of quarters.

As yet, no order had arrived to call the picket in, but my companion affirmed that the camp-rumor was a substantial one, and believed that we might expect such a command at any moment.

"What say they of me?" I inquired.

"Of you, Cap? Why nothing. What do you expect them to say of you?"

"Surely there has been some talk about my absence?"

"Oh, that! No, not a word, at least at head-quarters, for the simple reason, that you're not yet reported missing."

"Ah, that is good news; but how"——

"Why, the truth is, Holingsworth and I thought we might serve you better by keeping the thing dark—at all events, till we should be sure you were dead lost. We had'nt given up all hope. The greaser who guided you out, brought back word that two trappers had gone after you. From his description, I knew that queer old case Rube, and was satisfied that if anything remained of you he was the man to find it."

"Thanks, my friend, you have acted well; your discreet conduct will save me a world of mortification."

"No other news?" I inquired after a pause.

"No," said Wheatley; "none worth telling. O yes!" he continued, suddenly recollecting himself, "there is a bit. You remember those hang dog greasers that used to loaf about the village when we first came? Well, they're gone, by thunder! every mother's son of them clean *vamosed* from the place, and not a grease-spot left of them. You may walk through the whole settlement without seeing a Mexican, except the old men and

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the women. I asked the alcaldé where they had cleared to, but the old chap only shook his head, and drawled out his eternal "Quien sabe?" Of course they're off to join some band of guerrillas. By thunder! when I think of it, I wouldn't wonder if they were among that lot we have just scattered. Sure as shootin, they are! I saw Holingsworth examine the five dead ones as we rode off. He'll know them, I guess, and can tell us if any of our old acquaintances are among them."

Knowing more of this matter than Wheatley himself, I enlightened him as to the guerrilleros and their leader.

"Thought so, by thunder! Rafael Ijurra! No wonder Holingsworth was so keen to start—in such a hurry to reach the mound, he forgot to tell me who we were after. Deuce take it! what fools we've been to let these fellows slide. We should have strung up every man of them when we first reached the place—we should, by thunder!"

For some minutes we rode on in silence. Twenty times a question was upon my lips, but I refrained from putting it, in hopes that Wheatley might have something more to tell me—something of more interest that aught he had yet communicated. He remained provokingly silent.

With the design of drawing him out, I assumed a more careless air and inquired:

"Have we had no visitors at the post? Any one from the camp?"

"Not a soul," replied he, and again relapsed into meditative silence."

"No visitors whatever? Has no one inquired for *me*?" I asked, determined to come boldly to the point.

"No," was the discouraging reply. "O, stay: oh, ah—yes, indeed!" he added, correcting himself, while I could perceive that he spoke in a peculiar tone. "Yes, you *were* inquired for.'

"By whom?" asked I, in a careless drawl.

"Well, that I can't tell," answered the lieutenant in an evident

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tone of badinage; "but there appears to be *somebody* mighty uneasy about you. A slip of a Mexican boy has been backward and forward something less than a million of times. It's plain somebody sends the boy; but he's a close little shaver that same—won't tell who sends him, or what's his business; he only inquires if you have returned, and looks dead down in the mouth when he's told no. I have noticed that he comes and goes on the *road that leads to the hacienda.*"

The last words were spoken with a distinct emphasis. "We might have arrested the little fellow as a spy," continued Wheatley, in a tone of quiet irony, "but we fancied he might have been sent by some friend of yours."

The speaker concluded with another marked emphasis, and under the moonlight I could see a smile playing across his features. More than once I had "chaffed" my lieutenant about Conchita; he was having his revenge.

I was not in a mood to take offence; my companion could have taken any liberty with me at that moment—his communication had fallen like sweet music upon my ears, and I rode forward with the proud consciousness that I was not forgotten. Isolina was true.

Soon after, my eyes rested upon a shining object; it was the gilded vane of the little capilla, and beneath glistened the white walls of the hacienda, bathed in the milky light of the moon. My heart beat with strange emotions as I gazed upon the well-known mansion, and thought of the lovely jewel which that bright casket contained. Was she asleep? Did she dream—of what—of whom, was she dreaming?

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CHAPTER XLIV.

DUTCH LIGE IN A DIFFICULTY.

The soft blue light of morning was just perceptible along the eastern horizon as we rode into the rancheria. I no longer felt hunger. Some of the more provident of the rangers had brought with them well filled haversacks, and made me welcome to the contents. From their canteens I had satisfied my thirst, and Wheatley, as usual, carried his free flask.

Relieved of the protracted strain upon my nerves—of fear and vigil—I felt deadly weary, and, scarcely undressing I flung myself upon my leathern *catré* and at once fell asleep

A few hours repose had the desired effect, and restored both the strength of my body and the vigour of my mind. I awoke, full of health and hope. A world of sweet anticipations was before me. The sky and fortune were both smiling.

I made my toilet with some care—my *desayuna* with less—and then, with lighted cigar, ascended to my favorite lounge on the azotea.

The beautiful captive was in the midst of a crowd proudly curving his neck, as if conscious of the admiration he excited. The rangers, the poblanas, the hucksters of the plaza, even some sulky leperos stood near, gazing with wondering eyes upon the wild horse.

"Splendid present," thought I—"worthy the acceptance of a princess!"

It had been my intention to make the offering in person—hence the care bestowed upon my toilet. After more mature reflection, I abandoned this design. I was influenced by a va-

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riety of considerations—one, among others being a delicate apprehension that a personal visit from me might compromise the family at the hacienda. The *patriotic* sentiment was every day growing more intense. Even the acceptance of a present was a dangerous matter; but the steed was not to be a gift—only a return for the favourite that had fallen by my hand—and was not to appear in the character of a donor.

My sable groom, therefore, would convey the beautiful captive. Already the white lazo formed into a halter, was adjusted around the animal's head, and the negro only awaited orders to lead him away.

I confess that at that moment I felt somewhat annoyed at the publicity *of* my affair. My rough rangers were men of keen intelligence. I could tell from some whispers that had reached me, that one and all of them knew *why* I had gone upon the wild hunt, and I dreaded their good-humoured satire. I would have given something at that moment to have rendered the steed invisible—to have been able to transport him to his destination, Venus-like, under cover of a cloud. I thought of waiting for the friendly shelter of night.

Just then, however, and incident occurred which gave me the very opportunity I wanted—a scene so ludicrous, that the steed was no longer the cynosure of admiring eyes. The hero of this scene was Elijah Quackenboss.

Of all the men in my band, "Dutch Lige" was the worst clad. Not that there was less money expended upon his outward man; but partly from his ungainly form and loose untidy habits, and more, perhaps, from the wear and tear caused by his botanising excursions, a suit of broadcloth did not keep sound upon him for a week. He was habitually in tatters.

The skirmish of the night had been profitable to Lige; it was his true aim that had brought down one of the five guerrilleros. On his asserting this, his comrades had laughed at it as an idle vaunt; but Quackenboss proved his assertion to be correct by

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picking his bullet out of the man's body, and holding it up before their eyes. The peculiar "bore" of his rifle rendered the bullet easy of identification, and all agreed that Lige had shot his man.

By the laws of ranger-war, the spoils of this particular individual became the property of Quackenboss; and the result was, that he had shaken off his tattered rags, and now appeared in the plaza in full Mexican costume—comprising calzoneros and calzoncillos, sash and serapé, jacket and glazed hat, botas with gigantic spurs—in short, a complete set of ranchero habiliments!

Never was such a pair of legs incased in Mexican velveteens—never were two such arms thrust into the sleeves of an embroidered *jaqueta;* and so odd was the *tout ensemble* of the ranger thus attired, that his appearance in the plaza was hailed by a loud burst of laughter, both from his comrades and the natives who stood around. Even the gloomy Indians showed their white teeth, and joined in the general chorus.

But this was not the end. Among other spoils, Lige had made capture of a Comanche mustang; and as his own war-horse had been for a long time on the decline, this afforded him an excellent opportunity for a remount. Some duty of the day had called him forth, and he now appeared in the plaza leading the mustang, to which he had transferred his own saddle and bridle A fine handsome horse it appeared. More than one of his comrades envied him this splendid prize.

The laughter had scarcely subsided, when the order was given to mount; and with others, Quackenboss sprang to his horse. But his hips were hardly snug in the saddle, when the wicked Comanche "humped" his back and entered upon a round of kicking which seemed to exhibit every pose and attitude of equestrian exercise. First his hind-feet, then his fore ones, then all together, could be seen glancing in the air. Now a hoof whizzed past the ear of the affrighted rider, now a set of teeth threaten-

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ed his thighs, while every moment he appeared in danger of being hurled with violence to the earth. The sombrero had long since parted from his head, and the rifle from his hand; and what with the flapping of the wide trousers, the waving of the loose serapé, the dancing of the steel scabbard, the distracted motion of the rider's arms, his lank streaming hair and look of terror—all combined to form a spectacle sufficiently ludicrous; and the whole crowd was convulsed with laughter, and the plaza rang with shouts of "Bravo!" "Well done, Lige!" "Hooraw for you, old beeswax!"

But what surprised his comrades, was the fact that Quackenboss still kept his seat. It was well known that he was the worst rider in the troop; yet despite all the doubling and flinging of the mustang, that had now lasted for several minutes, he was still safe in the saddle. He was winning golden opinions upon the strength of his splendid horsemanship! The rangers were being astonished.

All at once, however, this mystery was explained, and the cause of his firm seat discovered. One of the bystanders, sharper than the rest, had chanced to look under the belly of the mustang, and the next moment shouted out:

"Hoy! look yonder! by Geehorum, *his spurs are clenched!*"

All eyes were lowered, and a fresh peal of laughter broke forth from the crowd as they perceived that this was in reality the case.

Lige, upon mounting—under the suspicion that the mustang was disposed for a fling—had clutched firmly with his legs, and these, on account of their extreme length, completely enveloped the body of the animal, so that his heels met underneath. He had forgotten his new spurs, the rowels of which, six inches in diameter, irritated the mustang and were no doubt the cause of such violent kicking. These, after a few turns, had got "locked," and of course held Quackenboss as firmly as if he had been strapped to the saddle. But as the rowels were now

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buried in the ribs of the mustang, the fierce brute, maddened with the pain, only grew more furious at each fling, and it was natural enough he should do his utmost to rid himself of so cruel a rider.

How long he might have kept up the pitching frolic before his involuntary tormentor could have freed himself, is a matter of conjecture. It would have been an unfortunate "fix" to have been placed in, alone upon the prairies.

Lige, however, found a compassionate bystander, who, having flung his lazo around the neck of the mustang, brought the spectacle to a termination.

CHAPTER XLV.

A LOVER ON THE TRAIL.

Taking advantage of the distraction caused by Quackenboss and his troubles, I despatched the black upon his interesting errand, and with no slight anxiety awaited the result.

From my position on the roof, I saw my messenger climb the hill, leading the proud steed; and saw them enter the great portal of the hacienda.

Promptly—almost directly—the groom came out again *without* the horse. The present had been accepted. So far well.

I counted the moments, till heavy footsteps were heard upon the escalera, and a shining black face rose over the roof.

There was no letter, no message beyond "*mil gracias.*"

I felt a pang of chagrin. I had expected thanks more formal than this mere phrase of compliment.

My man appeared better satisfied. A gold *onza* gleamed in his purple palm—a handsome perquisite.

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"By whom given?" I inquired.

"Golly, mas cap'n! De handsomest quaderoom gal dis nigga ever see guv it."

Beyond a doubt, Isolina herself was the donor! I could have broken the rascal's thick skull but that the queenly douceur gave proof of the satisfaction with which my offering had been received. Even on this trivial circumstance, I built my hopes of yet receiving a fuller meed of thanks.

Absorbed in these hopes, I continued to pace the azotea alone. It was a *die de fiesta* in the rancheria. Bells had already commenced their clangor, and other notes of preparation fell upon the ear. The poblanas appeared in their gayest attire—the Indians in bright naguas, with red and purple threads twisted in their black hair; the denizens of the ranchitos were pouring into the plaza, and processions were being formed by the church; *jaranas* were twanging their guitar-like music; and pyrotechnic machines were set up at the corners of the streets. Tinsel-covered saints were carried about on the shoulders of painted maskers; and there were Pilate and the Centurion, and the Saviour—a spectacle absurd and unnatural; and yet a spectacle that may be witnessed every week in a Mexican village, and which, with but slight variation, has been exhibited every week for three centuries.

I had no eyes for this disgusting fanfaronade of a degrading superstition. Sick of the sight, weared with the sounds, I had given orders for my horse to be saddled, intending to ride forth and seek repose for my spirit amid the silent glades of the chapparal.

While waiting for my steed, an object came under my eyes that quickened the beatings of my pulse: my gaze had been long turned in one direction—upon the hacienda of Don Ramon de Vargas.

Just then, I saw emerging from its gate, and passing rapidly down the hill, a horse with a rider upon his back.

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The snow-white color of this horse, and the scarlet manga of the rider, both contrasting with the green of the surrounding landscape, could not escape observation even at that distance, and my eyes at once caught the bright object. I hesitated not to form my conclusion. It was the white steed I saw; and the rider—I remembered the manga as when first my eyes rested upon that fair form—the rider was Isolina. She was passing down the slope that stretched from the hacienda to the river bottom, and the minute after the thick foliage of the platanus trees shrouded the shining meteor from my sight.

I noticed that she halted a moment on the edge of the woods, and fancied that she gazed earnestly towards the village; but the road she had taken led almost in the opposite direction.

I chafed with impatience for my horse. My resolve, made on the impulse of the moment, was to follow the white steed and his scarlet-clad rider.

Once in the saddle, I hurried out of the plaza, passed the ranchos of yucca, and reaching the open country, pressed my horse into a gallop.

My road lay up the river, through a heavily timbered bottom of gum and cotton woods. These were thickly beset with the curious *tillandsia*, whose silvery festoons, stretching from branch to branch, shrouded the sun, causing amongst the tree-trunks the obscurity of twilight.

In the midst of one of these shadowy aisles, I met or passed some one; I saw that it was a Mexican boy; but the sombre light, and the rapidity with which I was riding, prevented me from noting anything more. The lad shouted after me, uttering some words, which were drowned by the hoof-strokes of my horse. I deemed it some expression of boyish *esprit*, and, without heeding it, rode on. Not until far out of sight and hearing did it occur to me that I knew the voice and the lad. I recollected a sort of errand-boy attached to the hacienda, and whom I had seen more than once at the rancheria. I now remembered the badin-

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age of Wheatley, and would have returned to question the youth; but I had left him too far in the rear. After a moment's reflection, I spurred on.

I soon arrived at the base of the hill on which stood the hacienda; and here leaving the main road, I followed a bridle-path that skirted the hill. A few hundred yards brought me to the spot where I had last observed the object of my pursuit. The hoof-track of the white horse now guided me, and upon his trail I entered the woods.

For some distance, it followed a well-trodden path—a cattle track—but all at once it diverged from this, and struck off into a heavily timbered bottom, where not the semblance of path existed. Keeping the trace in view, I rode after.

As I advanced, the timber grew thicker, and the path more difficult. A close underwood of arundinaria and sabal palms shut up the way and the view; trailing roots obstructed progress below; while higher up, the trellis-work of llianas, bamboo briars, sarsaparilla, and gigantic grape-vines, rendered it necessary to bend down in the saddle in order to pass onward.

To my surprise, I noticed all this. For what purpose could she have chosen such a path? Was it indeed Isolina I had seen? A white horse and a scarlet manga are not uncommon things in Mexico. It might not be—— But the hoof-print——

I dismounted and examined it: I knew it at a glance—it was that of the noble steed, and the rider could be no other than Isolina de Vargas.

No longer in doubt, though still wondering, I followed the tracks. For a half mile or more the path meandered through thick forest, here turning around some giant trunk, there diverging to the right or left, to avoid the impervious net-work of canes and llianas.

At length it began to slope upwards; and I perceived by the ascent that I was climbing a hill. The woods became more open as I advanced—here and there alternating with glades—the

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trees were of slenderer growth, and the foliage lighter and thinner. I was no longer among the heavy trunks of platanus and liquidambar. The *leguminoseæ* were the prevailing trees; and many beautiful forms of inga, acacia, and mimosa, grew around. Myrtles, too, mingled their foliage with wild limes their branches twined with flowering parasites, as the climbing *combretum*, with its long flame-like clusters, convolvuli, with large white blossoms, and the beautiful twin-leaved bauhinia.

It was a wild garden of flowers—a shrubbery of nature's own planting. The eye, wandering through the vistas and glades, beheld almost every form of inflorescence. There were the trumpet-shaped bignonias—convolvuli in pendulous bells—syngenesists disposed in spreading umbels; and over them, closely set upon tall spikes, rose the showy blossoms of the bromelias—aloes and *dasylyrium*. Even from the tops of the highest trees hung gaudy catkins, wafted to and fro by the light breeze, mingling their sheen and their perfume with the floral *epiphytes* and parasites that clustered around the branches.

I could not help thinking that these flowers are gifted with life, and enjoy, during their short and transient existence, both pleasure and pain. The bright warm sun is their happiness, while the cold cloudy sky is the reflection of their misery.

As I rode onward, another reflection passed through my mind; it was caused by my perceiving that the atmosphere was charged with pleasant perfumes—literally loaded with fragrance. I perceived, moreover, that the same breeze carried upon its breath the sweet music of birds, whose notes sounded clear, soft, and harmonious.

What closet slanderer hath asserted that the flowers of this fair land are devoid of fragrance—that its birds, though brightly plumed, are songless?

Ah, Monsieur Buffon! with all your eloquence, such presumptive assertion will one day strip you of half your fame. You would never have approached within two hundred paces of a

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Stanhopea, of the *epidendum odoratum*, of the *datura grandiflora*, with its mantle of snow-white blossoms? You could never have passed near the pathos plant, the serbereæ, and tabernamontaneæ, the callas, eugenias, ocotas, and nictiginas?—you could never have ridden through a chapparal of acacias and mimosas—among orchids whose presence fills whole forests with fragrant aroma?

And more, Monsieur! you could never have listened to the incomparable melody of the mock-bird—the full, charming notes of the blue song-thrush—the sweet warbling voices of the silvias, finches, and tanagers, that not only adorn the American woods with their gorgeous colors, but make them vocal with never-ending song? No, Monsieur; you could never have inhaled the perfume of these flowers, nor listed to the melody of these sweet songsters; and sad it was of you, and silly as sad, to have yielded to the prejudice of a slender spirit, and denied their existence. Both exist—the singing birds and the fragrant flowers—both exist, and thou art gone.

On such reflections I dwelt but for a moment; they were merely the natural impression of surrounding subjects—short-lived sensations almost instantaneously passing away. The soul, benighted with love, has neither eye nor ear for aught beyond the object of its passion. From the contemplation of that only does it derive pleasure; and even the fairest pictures of nature may be spread before it without challenging observation. It was only that the one through which I was passing was of such transcendent beauty—so like to some scene of paradise—that I could not help regarding it with momentary admiration.

But my eyes soon returned to the earth, and once more taking up the trace of the steed, I rode on.

I had advanced near the summit, the tracks were quite recent; the branches that had been touched by the flanks of the horse had not yet ceased to vibrate; the rider could not be far in advance. I fancied I heard the hoof-stroke.

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Silently I pressed on, expecting every moment to catch the gleam of the scarlet manga, or the white sheen of the steed. A few paces farther, and both were under my eyes, glittering through the feathery frondage of the mimosas. I had followed the true track. The rider was Isolina.

I saw that she had halted. She had reached the top of the hill, where the growth of timber ceased. An opening of about an acre there was, surrounded on all sides by the flowery woods—the very *beau idéal* of a summer glade. The open summit commanded a view of the surrounding country--for the hill was a high one—while the charming spot itself enjoyed perfect privacy and repose.

In this glade she had drawn up, and was sitting silently in the saddle as if to enjoy the warbling of birds, the hum of the bees, and the fragrance of flowers.

I myself drew rein, and remained for some moments in a state of hesitancy, as to whether I should ride forward or go back. A feeling of shame was upon me, and I believe I would have turned my horse and stolen gently away, but just then I saw the fair rider draw forth from her bosom something that glittered in the sun. It was a watch, and she appeared to note the time. I observed that she looked anxiously over the tops of the low trees, in the direction of the plain below.

These circumstances, trivial as they might appear, produced within me a quick sense of pain. I felt as if hot steel was passing through my heart. I had ridden to my ruin—I had followed to be present at an assignation. Thus only could I explain the solitary ride, and by such difficult and devious paths; thus only could I account for the oft-repeated anxious glance, the ear acutely bent. Beyond a doubt, she was listening for the footsteps of a lover!

The rein fell from my fingers. I sat irresolute—I scarcely breathed--my heart felt cold and feeble—the birds mocked me

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—the parrots screeched his name—the *aras* in hoarse concert cried out "*Ijurra!*"

The name nerved me, as blood knits the sinews of the tiger. Once more my fingers closed upon my briddle, my feet became firm in the stirrups, and heart and arm swelled to their full strength. 'Twas but a light rapier that hung against my thigh—no matter; he might be no better weaponed: and even armed from head to heel, I feared him not. Three passions—hatred, jealousy and revenge—supplied an arm of treble strength, and under the influence of these I felt bold and sure of conquest. Yes! I felt at that moment, as though I could have slain my hated rival with my naked hands.

I was no longer troubled with scruples of etiquette. No; this monster owed me satisfaction—life itself: he had striven to take mine; and now his should be forfeit to my vengeance. On that spot—even in her presence—should he die, or I myself become the victim. The two of us should never go thence alive. "Oh, that he may reach the ground while my blood is thus hot, and my hand ready?"

The fierce thoughts stirring within me must have roused my horse, for at that moment he tossed his head and neighed wildly. A response came like an echo from the glade, and the instant after a voice called out:

"*Hola! quien va?*"

Concealment was no longer possible. I saw that I was observed; and, spurring my horse into the open ground, came face to face with Isolina.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

A DECLARATION ON HORSEBACK.

FACE to face with my beautiful brunette. Her eyes fell upon me in an expression of surprise. I felt abashed by the glance; my conduct was not *en règle*. I bethought me of an apology. What excuse could I offer for such unceremonious intrusion? Accident? She would not believe it; the time and the place were against such a supposition. With an intellect like hers, it would be idle to adopt so shallow an artifice No; I would not dissemble; I would boldly avow the truth. Jealousy had rendered me reckless of the result.

"*Adios, cavallero!*" said she, interrupting my hurried reflections. "*Carrambo!* where is your guide? How have you found this place?"

"Easily enough, señorita; I followed the tracks of your horse."

"But so soon—I did not expect you"——

"No; you expected another?"

"Certainly. I thought Cyprio would arrive before you"——

"Cyprio!"

"Cyprio—yes, Cyprio."

"Señorita! if this be another name for your Protean cousin, I have to say it will be better for him he should not arrive at all."

"My cousin?—better not arrive? Holy Trinity, capitan! I do not comprehend you!"

Her large brown eyes were rolling in astonishment. I was

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as much puzzled as she, but I had begun my explanation and was determined to carry it to the end.

"Then Señorita de Vargas, I shall be more explicit. If Rafael Ijurra appear upon this ground, either he or I leaves it not alive. He has attempted my life, and I have vowed to take his, whenever and wherever I may meet him."

"Pray heaven you may keep your vow!"

"Your cousin?"

"My cousin—Rafael Ijurra—my worst foe—the direst enemy of our house!"

"Ha! but were you not awaiting him?"

"Awaiting *him!* Ha, ha, ha! No. Little timid though I be, I should not desire to be here alone with Rafael Ijurra."

"Lady! you astonish me; pray explain"——

"*Por dios!* gallant capitan, 'tis you who need explain. I sought this interview to thank you for your noble gift. You meet me with anger in your eye, and bitter words upon your tongue."

"You sought this interview?—say you so, lady?"

"Certainly I did. For reasons already known to you, I dared not invite you to our house; so I have chosen this pretty glade for my drawing-room. How do you like it, cavallero?"

"In your society, señorita, the rudest spot would appear a paradise."

"Again the poet's tongue! Ah, capitan, remember the yellow domino! No more flattery, I pray; we are no longer *en masque*. Face to face, let us be candid with each other."

"With all my heart I accept the conditions. Candor is the very thing I desire, for to say the truth, I came prepared for a confession."

"A confession!"

"Precisely so; but since you are an advocate for candour, may I first ask a question?"

"Ho! you wish to play the confessor with me?"

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"I do, señorita."

"Bravo, capitan! Proceed! I shall answer you in all sincerity."

"Then, lady, what I would ask—Who is this Cyprio whom you expected?"

"Cyprio! Ha, ha, ha! Who should Cyprio be but my mozo; he who carried my message to you. Why do you put such a question?"

"He who carried your message to me?"

"Of course. Yonder is the *muchacho* himself. Hola, Cyprio! you may return to the house. *Carrambo*, capitan! both he and you must have sped well. I did not expect you for half an hour; but you soldiers are soon in the saddle. So much the better, for it is getting late, and I have a great deal to say to you."

A light had broken upon me. 'Twas Cyprio I had passed in the forest shade; the boy was the bearer of a message—hence his having hailed me. 'Twas I who was expected to keep the assignation; 'twas I for whom the timepiece had been consulted—for whom those earnest glances had been given! The bitter moments were past, and my heart swelled anew with proud and pleasant emotions. As yet she knew not that I had come without invitation. Cyprio, at the word of command, had gone off without making any reply, and my prompt appearance upon the ground was left unexplained.

I was about to account for it, and offer some apology for my brusque behavior, when I was challenged to the confession I had just promised.

Minor thoughts gave way before the important purpose I had formed, and to which the banter now recalled me. So fair an opportunity might never offer again. In the vicissitudes of a soldier's life, the chance of to-day should not be disregarded—to-morrow may bring change either in the scene or the circumstances; and I was skilled enough in love-lore to know that an hour unimproved is often followed by an age of regrets

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But, in truth, I do some wrong to my character ; I was but little under the influence of such cunning cognizance at that moment. I acted not by volition, but rather under pressure of a passion that held complete mastery over my will, and compelled me to the declaration I was about to make.

It was simple enough—three little words in either of the two sweet tongues in which we understood each other. I chose the one—of all others most attuned to the tones of the loving heart—and bending low to that fair face, and gazing into the liquid depths of those large inquiring eyes, I whispered the sweet, though oft-repeated phrase :

"*Yo te amo.*"

The words quivered upon my lips, but their tone proved the sincerity in which I had spoken. No doubt it was further manifest by the earnestness of my manner as I awaited her reply.

The habitual smile had departed from her lips ; the damask red deepened and rose higher upon her cheeks ; the dark fringes drooped downward, and half-concealed the burning orbs beneath: the face of the gay girl had suddenly assumed the serious air of womanhood.

At first, I was terrified by the expression, and could scarcely control my dread ; but I drew hope from the flushed cheek, the roseate neck, the swelling panting bosom. Emotions were stirring in that breast. Oh, what emotions ! will she not speak ? Will she not declare them ?

There was a long interval of silence—to me, it seemed an age.

"Señor," she said at length—'twas the first time I had heard that voice tremble—"Señor, you promised to be candid ; you have been so : are you equally *sincere* ?"

"I have spoken from the depth of my soul."

The long lashes were raised, and the love light gleamed from her liquid eyes ; for a moment it burned steadily, bathing

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my heart as with balm. Heaven itself could not have shed a brighter beam upon my spirit.

All at once a smile played upon her features, in which I detected, or fancied so, the gay *insouciance* that springs from indifference. To me it was another moment of pain. She continued:

"And, pray, capitan, what would you have me do?"

I felt embarrassed, and replied not.

"Would you have me declare that I love you?"

"Oh! you cannot—you do not"——

"You have not asked the question!"

"No, lady. I dreaded the answer."

"Ho! what a coward you have grown of late? A pity I am not masked. Shall I draw this veil? Ha, ha, ha!"

It was not the manner of love. Love laughs not. My heart was heavy; I made no reply, but with eyes upon the ground, sat in my saddle, feeling like one condemned.

For some moments her laughter rang in my ears, as I fancied, in mockery. The sweet silvery voice only grated upon my heart. Oh, that I had never listened to its siren tones!

I heard the hoof-stroke of her horse; and, looking up, saw that she was moving away from the spot. Was she going to leave me thus?

She spurred towards the centre of the glade, where the ground was higher, and there again pulled up.

"Come hither, cavallero!" she cried, "beckoning to me with her small gloved hand."

Mechanically I rode up to the spot.

"So gallant capitan! you who are brave enough to meet a score of foes, have not the courage to ask a woman if she loves you!"

A dismal smile was my only reply to this bitter badinage.

"Ah! capitan," she continued, "I will not believe it; ere

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now you have put that dreaded interrogatory– often, I fear, too often."

I looked at her with surprise. There was a touch of bitterness in the tone. The gay smile was gone; her evelids drooped; her look was turned upon the ground.

Was this real, or only a seeming? the prelude to some abrupt antithesis? some fresh outburst of satire?

"Señorita!" said I, "the hypothesis, whether true or false can have but little interest for you."

She answered me with a smile of strange intelligence. I fancied there was sadness in it. I fancied——

"We cannot recover the past," said she, interrupting my thoughts; "no, no, no! But for the present—say again—tell me again that you love me!"

"Love you!—yes lady"——

"And I have your heart, your whole heart?"

"Never—can I love another!"

"Thanks, thanks!"

"No more than thanks, Isolina?"

For some moments she remained silent, her eyes averted from me; she appeared struggling with some emotion.

"Yes, more than thanks," she replied at length; "three things more—if they will suffice to prove my gratitude."

"Name them!"

"Why should prudery tie my tongue? I promised to be candid. I too came here to make confession. Listen! Three things I have said. Look around you!—north, south, east, and west—the land you see is mine; be it yours, if you will."

"Isolina!"

This, too, can I bestow"—she held forth her little hand, which I clasped with fervid emotion.

"And the third?"

"The third, on second thoughts, I cannot give; 'tis yours already."

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"It is?"——

"*Mia corazon*" (My heart).

Those splendid steeds, like creatures of intelligence, appeared to understand what was said; they had gradually moved closer and closer, till their muzzles touched and their steel curbs rang together. At the last words, they came side by side, as if yoked in a chariot. It appeared delight to them to press their proud heaving flanks against each other, while their riders closing in mutual clasp, leaned over and met their lips in that wild fervid kiss which forms the climax of love.

CHAPTER XLVII.

STRAYED FROM THE TRACK.

We parted upon the top of the hill; it was not prudent for us to be seen together. Isolina rode away first, leaving me in the glade. We bade adieu in that phrase of pleasant promise, "*hasta la mañana*" (until to-morrow). To-morrow we should meet again. To-morrow, and to-morrow, we should visit that sweet spot, repeat our burning words, renew our blissful vows.

I remained some minutes on the ground, now hallowed and holy. Within, the tumult of triumphant passion had passed, and was succeeded by the calm repose of perfect contentment. My heart's longings had been gratified; it had found all that it desired—even to the full reciprocity of its passion. What would it more? There is no more of mundane bliss. Life has no facility to cope with requited love; it alone can give us a foretaste of future joys; by it alone may we form some idea of the angel existence of heaven.

The world without was in harmony with the spirit within

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The scene around me was rose-color. The lowers appeared fresher in tint, and breathed a sweeter fragrance in the air; the hum of the homeward bee, laden with treasures for his love queen, fell with a dreamy pleasure upon the ear: the voices of the birds sounded softer and more musical; even the *aras* and perroquets, chanting in more subdued tone, no longer pronounced that hated name; and the tiny Mexican doves—*las palomitas*, scarcely so large as finches—walked with proud gait over the ground, or side by side upon the branches of the myrtles—like types of tender love—told their heart's tale in soft and amorous cooing.

Long could I have lingered by that consecrated spot, even *hasta la mañana*, but duty claimed me, and its calls must not be disregarded. Already the setting sun was flinging purple beams over the distant prairie; and, heading my horse down the hill, I once more plunged under the shadows of the mimosas.

Absorbed in my supreme happiness, I took no heed of aught else; I noticed neither track nor path.

Had I left my horse to himself, most likely he would have taken the right road; but in my reverie, perhaps I had mechanically dragged upon the rein, and turned him from it. Whether or not, after a lapse of time, I found myself in the midst of thick woods, with not the semblance of a trail to guide me; and I knew not whether I was riding in the right direction. I ought rather to say that I knew the contrary—else I should long since have reached the clearings around the village.

Without much reflection, I turned in a new direction, and rode for some time without striking a trail. This led me once more into doubt, and I made head back again, but still without success. I was in a forest plain, but I could find no path leading anywhere; and amid the underwood of palmettoes I could not see any great distance around me. Beyond a question, I had strayed far out of my way.

At an early hour of the day, this would have given me little con

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corn; but the sun had now set, and, already, under the shadow of the moss-covered trees, it was nearly dark. Night would be down in a few minutes, and in all probability I should be obliged to spend it in the forest—by no means an agreeable prospect, and the less so that I was thinly clad and hungry. True, I might pass some hours in sweet reflection upon the pleasant incident of the day—I might dream rosy dreams—but, alas! the soul is sadly under the influence of the body; the spiritual must ever yield to the physical, and even love itself becomes a victim to the vulgar appetite of hunger.

I began to fear that, after all, I should have but a sorry night of it. I should be too hungry to think; too cold either to sleep or dream; besides, I was likely to get wet to the shirt: the rain had commenced falling in large heavy drops.

After another unsuccessful effort to strike a trail, I pulled up and sat listening. My eyes would no longer avail me; perhaps my ears might do better service.

And so it chanced. The report of a rifle reached them, apparently fired some hundred yards off in the woods.

Considering that I was upon hostile ground, such a sound might have caused me alarm; but I knew from the sharp whip-like crack that the piece was a hunter's rifle, and no Mexican ever handled a gun of that kind. Moreover, I heard, closely following upon the shot, a dull concussion, as of some heavy body dropped from a high elevation to the ground. I was hunter enough to know the signification of this sound. It was the game—bird or beast—that had fallen to the bullet.

An American must have fired that shot; but who? There were only three or four of the rangers who carried the hunter's rifle—a very different weapon from the "regulation" piece—old backwoodsmen who had been indulged in their whim. It might be one of these.

Without hesitation, I headed my horse for the spot, and rode as rapidly as the underwood would permit me. I certainly must

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nave passed the place where the shot had been fired, and yet I saw no one; but just as I was about to pull up again, a well known voice reached me from behind with the words:

"Jumpin Geehosophat! it ur the young fellur!"

Turning, I beheld my trapper comrades just emerging from the bushes, where they had cautiously *cachéd* on hearing the hoof-strokes of my horse.

Rube carried upon his shoulders a large turkey gobbler—the game I had heard drop—while upon Garey's back I observed the choice portions of a deer.

"You have been foraging to some advantage," I remarked, as they came up.

"Yes, capt'n," replied Garey, "*we* wont want for rashuns. Not but that your rangers offered us a plenty to eat; but ye see we couldn't in honor accept o' it, for we promised to find for ourselves."

"Ye-es, durn it!" added Rube, "we're free mountainee men—ain't a gwine to sponge on nobody—we ain't."

"An, capt'n," continued Garey, "thar don't appear to be any great eatin fixins about the place for yurself: if yu'll just accept o' the turkey, an one o' these hyar quarters o' the deer meat, thar's plenty left for Rube an me; ain't thar, Rube?"

"Gobs!" was the laconic answer.

I was not loth to satisfy the wish of the hunters—for to say the truth, the village larder had no such delicacies as either wild turkey or venison—and having signified my assent, we all three moved away from the spot. With the trappers for my guides, I should soon get into the right road. They, too, were on their return to the post. They had been in the woods since noon. They were both afoot, having left their horses at the rancheria.

After winding about half a mile among the trees, we came out upon a narrow road; here my companions, who were unacquainted with the neighborhood, were at fault as well as myself they knew not which direction to take. It was dark as pitch

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but, as on the night before, there was lightning at intervals Unlike the preceding night, however, it was now raining as if all the sluices of the sky had been set open; and by this time we were all three of us soaking wet. The whole canopy of heaven was shrouded in black, without a single streak of light upon it—not even a star. Who could discover the direction in such a night?

As the lightning flashed, I saw Rube bending down over the road; he appeared to be examining the tracks. I noticed that there were wheel-tracks—deep ruts—evidently made by the rude block-wheels of a *carreta*. It was these that the trapper was scanning.

Almost as soon as a man could have read the direction from a finger-post, Rube raised himself erect and crying out:

"All right—this way!" set off along the road.

I was curious to know how he had determined the point, and questioned him.

"Wal, yur see, young fellur, it ur the trail o' a Mexikin cart; an anybody as iver seed thet ur vamint knows it hez got only two wheels. But thur are four tracks hyur, an thurfor the cart must a gone back an fo'th, for I seed they wur the same set o wheels. Now, 'tur raizonable to s'pose thet the back-track leads to the settlements, an thet's this away."

"But how could you tell which was the back-track?"

"Wagh! thet ur easy as fallin' off a log. The back-track ur the fresher by more'n a kupple o' hours."

Pondering upon the singular "instinct" that enabled our guide to distinguish the tracks, I rode on in silence.

Shortly after, I again heard the voice of Rube, who was some aces in advance.

"I kud a knowd the way," he said, "'ithout the wheel-tracks: they only made things more sartint sure."

"How?" I asked. "What other clue had you?"

"The water," replied he; "'ee see, or 'ee mout, ef you'd

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looked into the tracks, thet it ur runnin' this-away. Do 'ee hear thet thur?"

I listened. I heard distinctly the sound of running water, as of a small stream carried down a rough rocky channel.

"Yes—I hear it"

"Wal," continued the trapper, "it ur a branch made by the rain: we're a follerin' it *down*; an thurfor must kum to the river jest whur we want to git. Oncest thur, we'll soon find our way, I reck'n. Wagh! how the durned rain kums down! It 'ud drown a muss-rat. Wagh!"

The result proved the trapper's reasoning correct. The road-water was running in the direction we had taken; and shortly after, the brawling branch shot out from among the bushes, and crossed our path, diverging from it at an acute angle. We could see, however, as we plunged through the now swollen streamlet, that the current, in its general direction, was the same with our road: it would certainly guide us to the river.

It did so. Half a mile further on we came out upon its banks, and struck the main road leading to the rancheria.

A few minutes' brisk travelling carried us to the outskirts of the village, when we were all three brought to a sudden halt by the sharp hail of the sentry, who called out the usual interrogatory:

"Who goes there?"

"Friends!" I replied; "'tis you, Quackenboss?" I had recognized the voice of the soldier-botanist, and under the lightning, saw him standing by the trunk of a tree.

"Halt! Give the countersign!" was the response in a firm determined tone.

I did not know this masonic pass-word. On riding out, I had not thought of such a thing, and I began to anticipate some trouble. I resolved, however to make trial of the sentry.

"I hav'n't got the countersign. 'Tis I, Quackenboss I am"——

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I announced my name and rank.

"Don't care for all that!" was the somewhat surly rejoinder, "can't pass 'ithout the countersign."

"Yer durned fool, it's yur captain," cried Rube, in a peevish tone.

"May be," replied the imperturbable sentry; "can't let him pass 'ithout countersign."

I now saw we were in a real dilemma.

"Send for the corporal of the guard, or either of the lieutenants," I suggested, thinking that that might be the shortest way to get out of it.

"Hain't got nobody to send," came the gruff voice of Quackenboss from out the darkness.

"I'll go!" promptly answered Garey—the big trapper thinking, in his innocence, there could be no reason why *he* should not carry the message to quarters—and as he spoke he made a step or two forward in the direction of the sentinel.

"Halt there!" thundered the voice of Quackenboss; "halt another step, and I'll plug you with a bullet."

"What's thet? plug he sez?" screamed Rube, leaping to the front. "Geeho Geehosophat! yu'll plug 'im, eh? Yur durned mulehead, if 'ee shoot this way, it'll be the last time yu'll ever lay claws to a trigger. Now then!" and Rube stood with his rifle half raised to the level, and threatening to raise it still higher.

At that moment, the lightning gleamed; I saw the sentry with *his* piece also at a level. I well knew the accuracy of his aim; I trembled for the result. In my loudest voice I called out:

"Hold, Quackenboss! hold your fire! we shall wait till some one comes;" and as I spoke, I caught both my companions, and drew them back.

Whether it was the commanding tone of my voice, which the ranger had heard before, or whether in the light he had recog-

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nized my features, I saw him, before it darkened, lower his piece, and I felt easy again.

But he still obstinately refused to let us pass. Further parley was to no purpose, and only led to an exchange of rather rough compliments between Quackenboss and my two companions; so after endeavoring to make peace between them, I stood still to await the chance of some one of the guard coming within hail.

Fortunately, at that moment, a ranger somewhat the worse for aguardiente, appeared in the direction of the plaza.

Quackenboss condescended to call him up; and after a crooked palaver, he was dispatched to bring the corporal of the guard.

The arrival of the latter ended our troubles, and we were permitted to reach the plaza without further hindrance; but as we passed the stern sentry, I could hear Rube mutter to him: "Ee durned mulehead! ef I hed ye out upon the parairas, wudn't I? Wagh!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AN ADIOS.

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow—a demilune of love, whose every hour was consecrated to its god. At earliest dawn, by the rosy rays of Aurora; at golden noon, shadowed under sweet acacias; in the gleam of the purple twilight, 'neath the silvery light of the moon.

That both laid our hearts upon his altar, and willing knelt before the shrine, witness ye bright birds and balmy flowers!—

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ye green myrtles and mimosas!—witness ye blue skies of Anahuac! Ye alone were our witnesses.

For you who have loved, I need not portray the pleasure of this noble passion; for you who have not loved, I cannot. Love is delight that may be known only to those who have experienced it

Ours was a half-month of happiness without alloy. True, there were moments of pain—the moments of daily parting—but these were brief, and perhaps only prevented the cloyment of too much joy—if such a thing be possible. Moreover, these short-lived sorrows were in part neutralized by the knowledge we should soon meet again; we never parted without exchanging that fair promise. In the morning, it was "*hasta la tarde;*" at night, our last words were "*mañana por la mañana.*" Lovers have felt, and poets have sung, the pleasures of hope; oft the anticipation of a pleasure rivals in piquancy its actual enjoyment.

Let memory not be forgotten; it, too, has its joys; and oh, how sweet the retrospect of those blissful hours! If there was monotony, it was a monotony of which my heart could never tire. It was an intoxication I could have endured for life. There is no surfeit of such sweets. Why are we not permitted to enjoy them for ever? Alas! there is an ending.

There was so. A crisis came, and we must part—not with the pretty promise upon our lips—"until the morning," "until the evening," but for long weeks, months, maybe years—an uncertain time—"*hasta seacabo la guerra*" (until the war is over).

Oh, the misery of that parting! Cruel destiny of war! Never felt I so weary of wearing a sword.

There was a struggle 'twixt love and duty. No, not duty: I might have sheathed my sword, and wronged no one; I was but a cipher among thousands, whose blade would scarcely have been missed. Nor would I have wronged myself. I was simply, as I have already declared, an adventurer. The country for which

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I fought could not claim me ; I was bound by no political conscience, no patriotic *esprit*. Perhaps, now and then, I entertained the idea that I was aiding the designs of "manifest destiny"—that I was doing God's work in battling against the despotic form. Yes, I may confess that such sparks glowed within me at intervals, and at such intervals only did I feel enthusiasm in the cause. But it was no consideration of this kind that hindered me from deserting my banner. Far otherwise : I was influenced by a motive purely selfish—pride.

I could not—an adventurer almost penniless—I *would* not presume to claim that richly doweried hand. Fortune I might never have to equal hers, but fame is worthy wealth, and glory mates with beauty. I knew that I was gifted with an apt head and a bold aspiring heart ; I knew that I carried a keen blade, and hoped to hew my way to rank and fame. Perhaps I might return with a star upon my shoulder, and a better handle to my name, and then——

Ah, for all that, it was a bitter parting ! It was hard to list unheeding to those earnest entreaties, adjuring me to stay—terrible to untwine those tender arms—terrible to utter that last *adios !*

Our troth was plighted within that same galde that had echoed our first vows. It had been plighted a hundred times, but never sadly as now, amidst sobs and tears. When the bright form, screened by the frondage, had passed out of sight, I felt as if the sun had become suddenly eclipsed. * * *

I lingered not long, though I could have stayed for hours upon the hallowed spot. Again duty, that stern commander, summoned me away. It was already close upon sunset, and by to-morrow's dawn I must be *en route* with my troop.

I was about heading my horse into the track, now, well known to me ; Isolina had gone down the hill on the opposite side, by a path that led more directly to the hacienda. From precaution, this had been our habitual mode of parting ; and we also met

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from opposite sides. In the wild region of the *cerro*—for by this name was the hill known—we never encountered a human being. There was no habitation near, and the vaqueros rarely strayed that way, so that our place of meeting remained a secret—at least we fancied so—and we acted without much apprehension, and perhaps without sufficient caution. Each hour we had grown more confident of security, and, blinded by love, had taken less pains to conceal the fact of our daily assignation. It was only that morning I had heard a whisper that our affair was known, and that they of the rancheria were not as benighted as we supposed them. Wheatley was my informant—Conchita, his. The lieutenant had added some friendly advice, cautioning me against the imprudence of going so far from the post unattended.

Perhaps I might have treated his remonstrance with less neglect; but as this was to be our last meeting for a long time, my heart grew heavy under the prospect of the parting scene. I preferred going companionless; I had no apprehension that any enemy was near. As for Ijurra, he was no longer in the neighborhood; he had not been seen since the night of the battle, and we had positive information that he joined his band with the guerrilla of the celebrated Canales—then operating on the road between Camargo and Monterey. Indeed had Ijurra been near, he could hardly have escaped the keen search of Holingsworth and the rangers, who, night and day, had been upon the scout, in hopes of overhauling him.

I was about turning into the old track, when a yearning came over me—a desire to obtain one more look at my beloved. By this time she would have reached her home; I should pass near the house; perhaps I might see her upon the azotea—a distant glance—a wave of the hand—haply the sweet prayer, "*va con Dios!*" wafted upon the breeze: something of the kind I anticipated.

My horse seemed to divine my wishes; scarcely waiting for

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the guidance of the rein, he moved forward upon the path taken by the steed of Isolina.

I soon reached the bottom of the hill, and, entering the heavy timber, traversed a tangled wood—similar to that on the other side of the cerro. There was no path, but the tracks of the white steed were easily followed, and, guiding myself by them I rode forward.

I had not gone five hundred yards from the hill, when I heard voices echoing through the woods, directly in front of me, and apparently at no great distance. Years of frontier life had imbibed me with an intuitive caution that resembled instinct; and as if by a mechanical effort, I pulled up and listened.

A woman was speaking; and instantly I recognized the voice. There was but one that rang with that rich metallic tone. I might well remember it, for the sweet, sad sounds of the *va con Dios* had not yet ceased to vibrate in my ears.

With whom was she in converse? Whom had she encountered in such a place, amid the wild woods?

She ceased speaking. With ears keenly set, I listened for the rejoinder. Naturally, I expected it in the voice of a man; but not that man. O heavens! it was the voice of Rafael Ijurra!

CHAPTER XLIX

THREATS.

YES, the voice was Ijurra's. I knew it well. While listening at by the mesa, I had noted its tones sufficiently to remember them—round, sonorous, of true Spanish accent, and not inharmonious, though at that moment they grated harshly upon my ear.

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An indescribable feeling came over me : it was not jealousy—I was too confident to be jealous—and yet, I shame to confess I felt a sensation sadly akin to it. After those earnest oaths, those tears and frenzied kisses, so soon after ! O shame upon me!

Alas ! the experienced heart no more enjoys the tranquil continuity of faith. Its belief is like a broken dream—an intermittence of light and shade. It was my misfortune, my error, perhaps my crime, to remember too many pairs of pretty perjured lips.

In a word, I was once more jealous, in spite of all that had passed—of sighs, and tears, and plighted vows—once more jealous of Ijurra !

But the moment before, his name was on her tongue, and spoken with scorn ; in the same breath I was assured that he was no longer in the neighborhood, that he was far away.

No ; he was upon the spot, in close conversation with her, and scarcely five minutes after the oath had been sworn that bound her to me for life ! Less wonder I was jealous.

That the feeling lasted only for an instant might be some palliation, but it was no merit of mine that brought it so quickly to a termination. I cannot screen my conduct behind an act of volition ; for although the poisoned sting rankled but for a few moments, during that short period I yielded obedience to its demoniac promptings.

I slipt down gently from my saddle, and with the crouching gait and silent tread of the jaguar, approached the speakers. My horse, well trained to such tactics, stayed where I had dismounted, without tie or hopple. No fear that his hoof would betray me

Step by step I advanced, with my hands cautiously parting the boughs. The fronds of a curious *sabal* palm befriended me. They grew vertically on short petioles, like large green fans ; and overlaying one another, formed a perfect screen

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through which the keenest eye could not perceive the approach of an intruder.

In a few seconds, I stood behind the last row that bounded the edge of a small opening; and peering through the serrate interstices of the leaves, I saw my betrothed and her cousin Isolina was still in the saddle. Ijurra was on foot, and standing by her stirrup, with one hand resting upon the pommel, the other grasping the rein.

Up to this moment, my heart had continued its painful throbbing; but the attitude of Ijurra, with his troubled and angry look, at once produced a revulsion in my feelings. I saw that the encounter had been accidental—at least on the part of Isolina; I saw that she was *detained*. I could not see her face; it was turned in the opposite direction, and towards Ijurra; but the tones of her voice reached me, and by these I perceived that she addressed him in anger. Oh, how those accents of indignation ravished my heart; sweeter were they to me than the softest melody!

As yet, I had heard nothing of what had passed between them; the loud beating of my heart, the rustling of the leaves under my feet, of the boughs as I pressed through them, had prevented me from distinguishing what was said. These sounds ceased as I came to a stop; and although still fifty paces distant from the speakers, I could catch every word of their conversation, from the loud tone in which it was carried on.

"So then you refuse?"

It was Ijurra who put this interrogatory

"I have done so before, Rafael; your conduct has given me no cause to change my mind."

"Ha! my conduct has nothing to do with it; you have other reasons Isolina, do not imagine I am such a *bobo*. I know your secret: you love this *gringo*—this Yankee captain.

"And suppose I do, that is my affair. Nay, more sir, I shall

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not even attempt to make a secret of it. I do love him—I do—I do"

Ijurra's eyes gleamed with malignant fire; his lips turned white, and tightened over his teeth; he seemed endeavoring to curb the exposure of his spleen

"And you would marry him?" he asked, with compressed emphasis.

"I *shall* marry him," was the prompt reply

"*Por todos santos!* it shall never be."

"And who is to hinder it?"

"I."

"Ha, ha, ha! You are raving, Rafael Ijurra!"

"You may love him to your heart's content—I care not; but marry him—never; s'death! never!"

"Indeed?"

"By the saints I swear it. I swear"——

"You have sworn enough: you are sufficiently perjured already."

"*Carrai!*" furiously shouted Ijurra, as if losing patience. "Listen to me, Isolina de Vargas! I have something to say that may not be so pleasant"——

"You can say nothing pleasant, but I listen."

"First, then, here are certain documents that concern you—both you and your father."

I saw some folded papers in his hand which he had taken from under his jacket. He opened and held them before her face, as he continued:

"This safeguard is one given by the American commander-in-chief to the Doña Isolina de Vargas. Perhaps you have seen it before? And here is a letter from Don Ramon de Vargas to the commissary-general of the American army, inclosed within another from that functionary to your pet filibustero—a pretty piece of treason this!"

"Well sir?"

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"Not so well for you, madame. You forget that General Santa Anna is now chief of this republic. Think you he will not punish such traitorous correspondence? *Carrambo*. if I but lay these documents before him, I shall have an order for the arrest of both yourself and your *Ayankieado* father as quickly as it can be spoken. Nay, more; the estate will be proscript and confiscated—it will become mine—mine!"

The speaker paused, as if for an answer. Isolina remained silent. I could not see her face to notice the effect. I fancied that the threat had terrified her. Ijurra continued:

"Now, señorita! you better comprehend our relative positions. Give your consent to become my wife, and these papers shall be destroyed on the instant."

"Never!" was the firm response that delighted my ears.

"Never!" echoed Ijurra; "then dread the consequences. I shall obtain orders for your arrest, and as soon as this horde of Yankee ruffians has been driven from the country, the property shall be mine."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the scornful laugh in reply—"ha, ha, ha! you mistake, Rafael Ijurra; you are not so far-sighted as you deem yourself; you forget that my father's land lies on the *Texan* side of the Rio Grande; and ere that horde of Yankee ruffians as you term them, be driven out, they will establish this river for their boundary. Where then will lie the power of confiscation? Not with you and your cowardly master. Ha, ha, ha!"

The reply maddened Ijurra still further, for he saw the probability of what had been said. His face became livid, and he seemed to lose all control of himself.

"Even so," he shouted, with the addition of a fierce oath—"even so, *you* shall never inherit those lands. Listen Isolina de Vargas; listen to another secret I have for you: know, señorita, that you are not the lawful daughter of Don Ramon!"

I saw the proud girl start, as if struck with an arrow.

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"I have the proofs of what I repeat," continued Ijurra; "and even should the United States triumph, its laws cannot make *you* legitimate. You are not the heiress of the hacienda de Vargas!"

As yet not a word from Isolina. She sat silent and motionless, but I could tell by the rising and falling of her shoulders that a terrible storm was gathering in her bosom

The fiend continued:

"Now, madame, you may know how disinterested it was of me to offer you marriage; nay, more, I never loved you; I told you so, it was a lie"——

He never lied in his life as he was doing at that moment. His face bespoke the falsehood of his words. It was the utterance of purest spleen. I read in his look the unmistakable expression of jealousy. Coarse as the passion may have been, he loved her—oh! how could it have been otherwise?

"Love you, indeed! Ha, ha, ha! love you—the daughter of a poor Indian—a *margarita!*"

The climax had come. The heaving bosom could bear silence no longer; the insult was unendurable.

"Base wretch!" cried she, in a voice of compressed agony, 'stand aside from my path!"

"Not yet," answered Ijurra, grasping the bridle more firmly 'I have something farther to communicate"——

"Villain! release the rein!"

"Before I do, you shall promise—you shall swear"——

"Again! let go! or this bullet to your heart!"

I had sprung from out the thicket, and was running forward to her rescue. I saw her right hand on high, and something shining in its grasp. It was a pistol. Its muzzle was turned upon Ijurra.

No doubt the resolute character of her who held it was well known to him, for the threat produced an immediate effect; the coward relaxed his hold, the reins dropped from his fingers, and

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with a mingled look of hatred and fear, he stepped back a pace.

The moment the bridle became free, the steed, already startled by the spur, bounded forward, and after half-a-dozen springs, both horse and rider disappeared behind the screen of the palmettoes.

I was too late to play the knight-errant. The "lady-faire" had not needed my help; she neither saw nor heard me; and by the time I arrived upon the ground, she had passed out of sight, and Ijurra was alone.

CHAPTER L.

AWKWARD ODDS.

IJURRA was alone, and I continued to advance to the spot where he was standing. His back was towards me, for he still fronted in the direction in which Isolina had galloped off. He had followed her with his eyes, with a cry of disappointed rage, with a threat of malignant vengeance.

The sound of his own voice hindered him from hearing mine, and he was not aware of my presence, when I paused scarcely three feet from where he stood, and directly behind him. I held my sword drawn; I could have thrust him in the back, through and through again, before he could have offered either defence or resistance. He was completely in my power.

Fortunate was it for him at that moment that I had been bred a gentleman, else in another instant his lifeless body would have lain at my feet. A plebeian blade would have made short work with the ruffian, and I confess that my instincts of fair play were sorely tried. I had before me a man who had sought my life—a deadly foe—a deadly foe to her I loved—a perjured

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villain—a murderer! With such titles for himself, he had none to the laws of honor; and I confess that for one short moment, I felt like ignoring his claim. 'Twas but for a moment: the thought revolted. Wicked and worthless as he was, I could not stab him in the back.

I leaned forward, and tapping him upon the shoulder, pronounced his name.

It was the first intimation he had of my presence; and starting as if hit by a bullet, he turned face towards me. The flush of anger upon his cheek suddenly gave place to a deadly pallor, and his eyes became set in that peculiar stare that indicates an apprehension of danger. This he must have felt keenly, for my determined look and drawn sword—to say nothing of the surprise by which I had come upon him—were calculated to produce that effect.

It was the first time we had stood face to face, and I now perceived that he was a much larger man than myself. But I saw, too, that his eye quailed and his lip quivered at the encounter. I saw that he was cowed; and I felt that I was his master.

"You are Rafael Ijurra!" I repeated, as he had not made answer to my first interrogation.

"*Si señor*," he answered hesitatingly. "What want you with me?"

"You have some documents there" (he still held the papers in his hand); "a portion of them belongs to me. I shall trouble you to hand them over."

"Are you Captain Warfield?" he asked, after a pause, at the same time pretending to examine the superscription upon the commissary's letter. I saw that his fingers trembled.

"I am Captain Warfield—you ought to know by this time."

Without noticing the insinuation, he replied: "True—there is a letter here bearing that address. I found it upon the road; you are welcome to it, señor."

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As he said this, he handed me the commissary's order, still retaining the other documents.

"There was an inclosure? I perceive you have it in your hand. I beg you will make me equally welcome to that."

"Oh! a note signed Ramon de Vargas? It was an enclosure?"

"Precisely so; and of course goes along with the letter."

"O certainly: here it is señor."

"There is still another little document in your possession—a safeguard from the American commander granted to a certain lady. It is not yours, Señor Ijurra! I beg you will deliver it to me. I wish to return it to the lady to whom it belongs."

This was the bitterest pill I had yet presented to him. He glanced hastily first to the right and then to the left, as if desirous of making escape. He would fain have done so, but I kept him under my eye, and he saw that my hand was ready.

"Certainly there is a safeguard," replied he, after a pause, and with a feigned attempt at laughter. "'Tis a worthless document to me; 'tis at your service, sir captain;" and as he handed me the paper he accompanied the act with another sorry cachinnation.

I folded the precious documents, and thrust all three under the breast of my coat; then placing myself in fighting attitude, I cried out to my adversary to "draw and defend himself."

I had already noticed that he wore a sword, and, like myself, it appeared to be the only weapon he carried. I saw no pistols upon his person. I had none myself—nothing save a light cut-and-thrust sword. It was far slighter than the sabre of my antagonist, but it was a weapon that had seen service in my hands, and I had perfect confidence in it. I had no fear for the result against so cowardly an adversary; I was not awed, either by his heavier blade, or the superior size of his person.

To my astonishment, he hesitated to unsheathe his sword!

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"You *must* draw," I shouted with emphasis. "You or I have now to die. If you do not defend yourself I shall run you through the body. Coward! would you have me kill you with your blade in its sheath?"

Even the taunt did not nerve him. Never saw I so complete a poltroon. His white lips trembled, his eyes rolled wildly from side to side, seeking an opportunity to escape, for I am certain that could he have hoped to get clear, he would at that crisis have turned and run.

All at once, and to my surprise, the coward appeared smitten with courage; and grasping the hilt of his sabre, he drew the blade ringing from its scabbard, with all the energy of a determined man! His reluctance to fight seemed suddenly to have forsaken him. Had I mistaken my man? or was it despair that was nerving his arm?

His cowed look had disappeared; his eyes flashed with fury and vengeance; his teeth gritted together; and a fierce *caraje* hissed from his lips.

Our blades met—the sparks crackled from the creasing steel, and the combat began.

Fortunate for me, that, in avoiding the first lounge of my antagonist, I had to turn half round; fortunately I turned so soon, else I should never have left that glade alive.

As I faced in the new direction, I saw two men running towards us, sword in hand. A single glance told me they were guerrilleros. They were already within ten paces of the spot, and must have been seen long before by Ijurra.

This was the key to his altered demeanor. Their approach it was that had inspired him with courage to begin the fight, for he had calculated the time when they should be able to get up and assail me from behind.

"*Hola!*" shouted he, seeing that I had discovered them—"*Hola! El Zorro—José! anda! anda! Mueran los Yankies al muerte con el picaro!*"

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For the first time, I felt myself in danger. Three swords to one was awkward odds; and the red giant, with a companion nearly as large as himself, would no doubt prove very different antagonists from the poltroon with whom I was engaged. Yes, I was conscious of danger, and might have retreated, had I deemed such a course possible; but my horse was too far off, and the new comers were directly in the path I should have to take to reach him. I could not hope to escape on foot; I well knew that these men run as lightly as Indians, for we had often proved their capacity in that accomplishment. They were already too near. I should be overtaken, struck down, pierced, with my back to the foe.

I had no time to reflect—just enough to leap back a pace or two, so as to bring all three of them in front of me, when I found my sword clashing against their blades, and parrying their blows one after the other.

I can describe the unequal combat no further. It was a confused medley of cut and thrust, in which I both gave wounds and received them. I was wounded in several places, and felt the warm blood running under my clothes and over my face. I was wearied to death, and every second growing weaker and fainter I saw the red giant before me with his hand raised on high. His blade had already drawn my blood, and was crimsoned at the point; it was about to descend with a finishing stroke. I should be unable to parry it, for I had just exhausted my strength in guarding against a blow from Ijurra. My hopeless peril wrung from me a cry of despair.

Was it my cry that caused the blade to drop from the hand of my antagonist, and the uplifted arm to fall loosely by his side? Was it my cry that created the consternation suddenly visible in the faces of my foes? I might have fancied so, had I not heard a sharp crack from behind, and seen that the arm of El Zorro was broken by a shot!

It seemed like the awaking from some horrid dream. One

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moment I was battling, face to face, with three desperate men; the instant after, their backs were towards me, and all three were running as for life!

I followed them with my eyes, but not far; for at twenty paces off they plunged into the thicket, and disappeared.

I turned in the opposite direction. A man was running across the open ground with a gun in his hand; he was advancing toward the spot where I stood. It was he who had fired the shot. I saw that he was in Mexican costume; surely he was one of the guerrilleros—he had aimed at me, and wounded his comrade?

For some seconds, I fancied that such might be the case. Evidently he was bolder than any of the three, for he continued to advance, as if determined to attack me alone!

I placed myself in readiness for this new antagonist, taking a fresh grasp on my sword, and wiping the blood from my eyes, that I might the better receive him.

It was not until he was close to the point of my blade, that I recognized the long ape-like arms, and crooked mateless limbs of Elijah Quackenboss!

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CHAPTER LI.

AN OFFICIAL BLACK LIST.

The ranger, after delivering his fire, had not waited to reload, but ran forward with the intention of joining me in the hand-to-hand fight, though he carried no other weapon than his empty gun. But this would have been an efficient arm in such hands; for, despite his unsymmetrical build, Dutch Lige was stalwart and tough, and would have been a full match for any two of my assailants, had they stood their ground. But the crack of the gun had set them off like deer. They fancied, no doubt, that a stronger force was near; perhaps they remembered the terrible rifles of the trappers, and no doubt believed it was they who had arrived to the rescue. Indeed, such was my own belief, until I saw the oddly costumed ranger bounding towards the spot.

A glance satisfied me that I owed my preservation to Lige's love of botanical science. A large globe-shaped cactus plant, bristling like a hedgehog, hung dangling from the swivel of his gun—it was thus carried to save his fingers from contact with its barbed spines—while stuck into every loop and button hole of his dress could be seen the leaves and branchlets, and fruits and flowers, of a host of curious and unknown plants. He had been herborizing in the woods; and coming by chance within ear-shot of the scuffle, had scrambled through the bushes just in time to spoil the *coup-de-grâce* intended by El Zorro.

"Thanks, Quackenboss! thanks, my brave friend! you came in good time: you have saved me."

"But a poor shot I've made, capten. I ought to have broken

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that red divel's skull, or sent my bullet into his stomach; he's got off too easy."

"It was a good shot: you broke his arm, I think."

"Ach! 'twas a poor shot; the cactus spoiled my aim. You hurt, capten?"

"I am wounded, but not mortally, I think. I feel a liitl faint · 'tis only the blood. My horse—you will find him yon der—among the trees—yonder. Go, Lige; bring my horse—my horse"——

For some minutes, I was out of the world. When consciousness came back, I perceived that my steed had been brought up and stood near. The botanist was bending over me, and binding up my wounds with strips torn from his own shirt. He had one boot on; the other stood by, full of water, a portion of which he had already poured down my throat, and with the rest he proceeded to bathe my temples and wash the blood from my face.

This done, I soon felt refreshed and strong enough to mount; and having climbed into the saddle, I set out for the rancheria, my companion half guiding, half leading my horse.

By the path which we followed, we should have to pass close to the hacienda and within sight of it; but night had come on, and the darkness would hinder us from being observed. It was what I now desired, though I had left the cerro with hopes and wishes directly the reverse. With a red gash upon my forehead—my uniform torn and bloodstained—I feared being seen, lest my invalid appearance should create unnecessary alarm. But we passed on without meeting any one, either by the hill or upon the main road; and in half an hour after, I was safe within my *cuarto* in the house of the alcaldé. * * *

The incidents of the day preyed upon my spirits, and I was far from feeling easy about the future. I knew that my betrothed would be true till death; and I felt ashamed that I had doubted her, even for a moment. About her loyalty I had no uneasiness, and I mentally vowed never more to give way to suspicion.

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It was no thought of that that now troubled me, but an anxiety about *her personal safety;* and this grew stronger the more I pondered upon it, till it assumed almost the form of a fear.

The man who had used such bitter threats, and behaved with so much rudeness, would scarcely stop at anything. 'Tis true I had deprived him of much of his power over her, by stripping him of the dangerous documents; but it was not the time, nor was he the man to stand upon nice distinctions of legality, where jealousy and cupidity were the incentives to action. Holding a sort of irresponsible office as the chief of what was less a patriotic guerrilla than a band of brigands, it was difficult to tell what such a monster might or might not attempt. In our absence from the post the ruffian would be full master of the neighborhood. What deed might he not accomplish with impunity, holding his power directly from the unprincipled dictator, whom he was accustomed to imitate as a model, and who would endorse any act of villainy, provided it was the act of one of his own satellites. I shuddered as I reflected.

The reappearance of Ijurra and his band—for I doubted not that his followers were near—their reappearance in that vicinity, and at such a crisis—just as we were being withdrawn—had something ominous in it. They must have known ere this of the plan of campaign designed for the American army. Wheatley's rumor had proved well-founded. The new commander-in-chief, Scott, had arrived upon the ground, and three-fourths of the "army of occupation" had been draughted to form the expedition destined to act upon Vera Cruz. As this greedy general stripped our old favorite "Rough and Ready" of *only* his best troops, we had the consolation of knowing that the "rangers" were among the "picked;" though for all that, many of us would have preferred remaining with the brave veteran who had already led us so often to victory. I can answer for Wheatley and myself; I might also vouch for Holingsworth, though far different were his motives for wishing to remain on the Rio

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Grande. His sweetheart was revenge—in his breast long cherished—to his heart faithful and true.

I have said that our design must have been known ere this; indeed the army was already in movement, Troops and brigades were marching upon Brazos Santiago, and Tampico, there to be embarked for the south, and all that were to go had received their orders. The provinces on the Rio Grande were not to be entirely abandoned, but the army left there was to have its lines contracted, and would therefore cover much less ground. Not only was our little post to be deserted, but the neighboring town, which had long been the head-quarters of a division, was also to be evacuated. No force of our army would remain within fifty miles of the rancheria; and perhaps no American troop would ever again visit that isolated village. The reflection rendered me more than melancholy.

No doubt of it—the enemy was apprised of our movements. In our special case—that *we* the rangers were to march on the following morning—was well known to the people of the neighborhood. It had been known to them for several days; and it had not passed unobserved by us that the citizens of the place—those who were not Ayankieados—had lately shown themselves more sulky and inhospitable, in proportion as the time approached for our departure. This *brusquerie* had led to several street-conflicts, in which knives had been drawn and blood spilled, and much "bad blood" begotten on both sides.

Another circumstance was not unnoticed amongst us. Ribald pasquinades, rudely written, and accompanied by threats of proscription, were at this time thrust under the doors of such of the citizens as had been friendly to us. Even the alcaldé had received some documents of this character—perhaps emanating from a jealous *tiendero* who had looked with bitter eye upon the courtship of Wheatley and Conchita. It was not till afterwards I learned that similar missives had "come to hand" in a quarter that more concerned myself.

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Some scouted the absurdity of these acts, alleging that they sprung from personal enmity, or originated in the mob-patriotism of the *leperos*. It was not so, as I afterwards learned; the government of the country, or at all events, several of its prominent members, countenanced the meanness: and at their instigation, a "black list" was made out in every town and village through which the American army had occasion to pass. Let the minister, Señor O——, make answer to this accusation.

I was musing on this disagreeable theme, after my return from the cerro, and endeavoring to sketch out some plan for the safety of my betrothed during my absence; but my thoughts proved barren. With a sort of faint hope that the villain Ijurra might yet fall into our hands, I had dispatched Holingsworth —nothing loath for the duty—with a party of rangers upon his trail, and I was impatiently awaiting their return.

The voice of Wheatley aroused me from my reverie.

"Well, lieutenant, what is it?"

"Only that precious boy," answered he, with a significant smile, at the same time ushering "Cyprio" into the room.

The lad carried a note, which I opened. A green sprig of juniper was enclosed and the simple word "*tuya*" was written in pencil. I knew the symbol well. The juniper is *tuya* in the most beautiful of tongues, and *tuya* from my lady signifies 'yours.'

"Anything more?" I asked of the messenger.

"Nothing, Señor Capitan," answered the intelligent boy "only to inquire if you had arrived safe."

She had been anxious then!

I separated the branchlet into two equal parts; one I placed in my bosom: the other having fervently kissed, I inclosed in a folded sheet, upon which I wrote the words:

"*Tuyo—tuyo—hasta la muerte!*"

Cyprio bore back my parting message.

At midnight, Holingsworth and his party came in from the scout. Nothing had been seen of the guerrilla.

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CHAPTER LII.

THE ROUTE.

It was a struggle between Aurora and the moon which of them should rule the sky, when our bugle rang its clear *réveillé*, rousing the rangers from their slumber, and startling their steeds at the stall. The goddess of morning soon triumphed, and under her soft blue light, men and horses could be seen moving about, until the bugle again sounded; this time to "boot and saddle;" and the rangers began to form in the plaza, and prepare for the route.

A single wagon with its white tilt and long team of mules, already "hitched up," stood near the centre of the square. It constituted the whole baggage-train of the corps, and served as an ambulance for our invalids. Both baggage and sick had been safely stowed, and the vehicle was ready for the road. The bugler, already in his saddle, awaited my orders to sound the "forward."

I had climbed to my favorite "smoking-room," the azotea. Perhaps it was the last time I should ever set foot on those painted tiles. My eyes wandered over the plaza, though I little heeded what was passing there. Only the salient points of the picture were noted by me—steeds under saddle and bridle; men buckling on folded blankets, holsters, and valises; a few already in the saddle; a few more standing by the heads of their horses; and still another few grouped around the door of the *pulperia*, having a last drink of *mezcal* or *catalan* with their swarthy Mexican acquaintances. Here and there, in front of some adobé hut, might be observed a more tender leave-taking. The ranger

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fully equipped—with arms, haversack, and canteen—leaning against the heavy bars of a window, with face turned inward, as though he was talking to some prisoner through the grating of a jail. But he is himself the real captive, ensnared during his short sojourn, and still held in chains by the olive-skinned *poblana*, whose dark liquid eyes may be seen on the other side of the reja, flashing with love, or melting with sad tenderness at the prospect of parting.

Others, again, are bidding their *adios* in retired corners, under the shadow of the church walls, or in groups of four or five more openly in the plaza, itself. Early as is the hour, the people have all arisen; and not a few of the brown, rebosa-clad short-skirted wenches are already on their way, *jarro* on head, to the fountain. There the pitchers are filled, and lifted on their heads —perhaps for the last time—by the rangers, who perform the office with all the rude grace in their power. Then follows a profusion of smiles and bows, and a dialogue, on the ranger's part extending to the whole of his Spanish, which consists of the phrase:

"Mucho bueno, muchacha!"

The usual reply, accompanied with a display of pretty white teeth, is:

"Mucho bueno, cavallero! mucho bueno Tejano!" given in like ungrammatical phrase, in order that it may be intelligible to the person to whom it is addressed.

I have often been suprised at the success of my great uncouth followers with these *petite* dark-eyed damsels of Anahuac; but, indeed, many of the rangers are not bad-looking men. On the contrary, there are handsome fellows among them, if they were only put into clean shirts, and a little more closely shaven. But woman's eye is keen-sighted in such matters: she easily penetrates through the disguise of dust, the bronze of sun-tan, and the shaggy mask of an ill-kept beard; and no eye is quicker in this respect that than of the fair Mexicana. In the big, ap-

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parently rude, individual, called a "ranger," she beholds a type of strength and courage, a heart that can cherish, and an arm that can protect her. These are qualities that, from all time, have won the love of woman.

It is evident they are not all friends whom we are leaving behind us. Hostile faces may be observed, many of them peering from open doors or windows. Here and there a sulky lepero swings about in his blanket, or cowers by the corner of the street, scowling savagely from under his broad-brimmed hat Most of this class are absent—as long since ascertained—with the guerrilla; but a few still remain to give shadow to the picture. They regard the approaches towards the women with ill-concealed anger; and would resent this politeness if they dared. They confine the exhibition of their spite to the dastardly meanness of ill-treating the women themselves, whenever they have an opportunity. No later than the night before, one of them was detected in beating his sweetheart or mistress for the crime, as was alleged, of dallying too long in the company of a Tejano. The Tejano, in this case, took the law into his own hands, and severely chastised the jealous *pelado*.

Even in the hurried glance which I gave to these scenes of leave taking, I could not help noticing an expression on the faces of some of the young girls that had in it a strange significance It was something more than sadness; it was more like the uneasy look that betokens apprehension.

Perhaps the state of mind I was in magnified my perceptions. At that moment, a struggle was passing in my own breast, and a feeling of irresolution lay heavy upon me. All night long had my mind dwelt upon the same thought—the danger that menaced my betrothed—all night long I had been occupied with plans to avert it, but no reasonable scheme had I succeeded in devising.

It is true the danger was only hypothetical and undefined, but it was just this supposititious indefiniteness that caused the difficulty in providing against it. Had it assumed a tangible

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shape, I might more easily have adopted some means of avoiding it; but no—it remained a shadow, and against a shadow I knew not what precautions to take. When morning broke, I was still struggling under the same nervous indecision.

Problematical as was the peril my fancy had formed, there were moments when it appalled me—moments when my mind labored under a painful presentiment, and I could not cast the load by any act of volition. With all my philosophy, I could not fortify myself against the belief that "coming events cast their shadows before;" and, spite of myself, I kept repeating in thought the weird prophetic words. Upon my soul, certainly, there were shadows, and dark ones; if the events should have any correspondence with them, then there was misery before me

I have termed the danger in which Isolina was placed indefinite: it was not so indefinite, after a slight analysis; it was directly traceable to the presence of Rafael Ijurra. True, there were other sources of apprehension; other perils surrounded her, arising from the disturbed state of the country—but these did not point at her in particular. That frontier province had been for years in a distracted condition—by revolution or Indian invasion—and war was no new thing to its people. In the midst of strife had the fair flower grown to perfect blooming, without having been either crushed or trodden upon. Isolina de Vargas was a woman of sufficient spirit to resist insult and cast off intrusion. I had just had proof of this. Under ordinary circumstances, I had no fear that she would be unequal to the emergency; but the circumstances in which she now stood were not of that character; they were extraordinary and to an extreme degree. In addition to the light thrown upon Ijurra's designs by his own menacing confession, I knew other particulars of him Holingsworth had helped me to a knowledge of this bad man, and that knowledge it was that rendered me apprehensive. From a nature so base and brutal, it was natural I should dread the worst.

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But what could I do? I might have thrown up my commission, and remained upon the spot, but that would have been worse than idle. I could not have protected myself, much less another. The rangers once gone from the place, my life would not have been safe there for a single hour.

Only one plan suggested itself that had the semblance of feasibility—to seek another interview with Isolina—her father as well—and adjure them to remove at once from the scene of danger. They might go to San Antonio de Bexar, where, far removed from hostile ground, they could live in safety till the war should be ended.

It was only at the last moment that this happy idea came into my head, and I reviled myself that I had not conceived it sooner. The chief difficulty would lie in the opposition of Don Ramon. I knew that he was aware of the *friendship* that existed between his daughter and myself, and furthermore, that he had opposed no obstacle to it; but how could I convince him of the necessity for so sudden an expatriation as the one I was about to propose? how should I persuade him of the peril I myself dreaded? and from such a source!

Another difficulty I might encounter—in the proud spirit of Isolina herself. Much did I fear she would never consent to be thus driven from her home, and by such a poltroon as she knew her cousin to be. She had cowed and conquered him but the day before; she feared him not; she would not be likely to partake of my painful apprehensions. My counsel might be disregarded, my motives misconstrued.

The time, too, was unfavorable. We must be on the march by sunrise—so ran our orders—and already the day was breaking. I cared not much for this: I could easily have have overtaken my troop; but it was a delicate matter—that could only by excused by a certain knowledge of danger—to awake a gentleman's family at such an hour, even for the purpose of warning them. Moreover, should my advice prove fruitless, I reflected

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that my visit—which could not be made in secret—might aid in bringing about the very danger I apprehended. A circumstance so extraordinary could not fail to be noticed by all.

It was thus that I was held in irresolution, while my troop was forming for the march.

At the last moment, thanks to the thoughtful Holingsworth, a compromise offered. He suggested that I should send my advice in writing. In that I could be as explicit as I pleased, and bring before my protégées all the arguments I might be able to adduce—perhaps more successfully than if urged by a personal appeal.

My comrade's suggestion was adopted; and in haste, but with a fervor resulting from my fears, I penned the admonitory epistle. A trusty messenger was found in one of the *Ayankieados*, who promised, as soon as the family should be stirring, to carry the letter to its destination.

With my heart somewhat relieved of its load, though still far from light, I gave the order to march. The bugle rang clear and loud, and its cheerful notes, as I sprang into the saddle, combined with the inspiration borrowed from my buoyant steed, produced a soothing effect upon my spirit.

CHAPTER LIII.

CAMP GOSSIP.

It was but a short-lived light—a passing gleam—and soon again fell the shadow, dark as ever. Strive as I might, I could not cast the load that weighed upon my bosom; reason as I would I could not account for its heaviness.

It was natural that a parting like ours should produce pain.

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and misgivings as to the future. My life was o be staked in the lottery of war; I might fall on the field of fight; I might perish by camp-pestilence—a foe that in the campaign kills more soldiers than sword or shot—the many perils of flood and field were before me, and it was natural I should regard the future with a degree of doubtfuless. But it was not the contemplation of all these dangers that filled me with such a terrible foreboding. Strange to say, I had a forecast that I should survive them. It was almost a conviction, yet it failed to comfort me. It comprehended not the safety of Isolina. No—but the contrary. Along with it came the presentiment, that we should never meet again.

Once or twice, as this dread feeling became most acute, I reined up my horse, half resolved to gallop back; but again the wild idea passed from from me, and I continued irresolutely on.

Something of prudence, too, now restrained me from returning: it would no longer have been safe to go back to the rancheria. As we issued from the plaza, we could hear distant jeering, and cries of "*Mueran los Tejanos!*" It was with difficulty I could restrain the rangers from turning to take vengeance. One, the worst for mezcal, had loitered behind, under the influence of the drink, fancying himself secure. Him the *pelados* had "bonneted," and otherwise maltreated. They would have murdered him outright, but that some of them, mere prudent than their fellows, had counselled the mob to let him go—alleging that the Tejanos were yet "too near, and might come back."

Again I had strife with my men; they would have returned and fired the place, had I permitted them. Fortunately, he who had been ill treated was a good-for-nothing fellow—scarcely worth the sympathy of his comrades—and I was well satisfied at his having received a lesson. It might be useful, and was much needed, for "straggling" was one of the ranger-crimes most difficult to cure.

Along the road, we saw signs of a guerrilla. Shots were fired at us from a hill; but a party sent to the place encountered no

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one. Horse-tracks were observed, and once a trace of mounted men were seen galloping away over a distant slope. It might be the band of Parra, and doubtless it was so; but we fancied at the time that Charles himself was near; and as an encounter with a large and well-organized force would be a very different affair from a skirmish with the other, we felt the necessity of avoiding it if possible.

[illegible] of a fight with that band [illegible] created [illegible] the [illegible] Parra as the Texans termed him—or to have [illegible] of his band, would have been encountered a fate of [illegible] nature—a nature in [illegible] to a practical [illegible] of "[illegible]." Santa Anna himself [illegible] was at that moment [illegible] with the [illegible] and the [illegible] of meeting him on a wide [illegible]

[illegible] of the Chap[illegible] [illegible] or for [illegible] Charles [illegible] for [illegible] [illegible] to encounter [illegible] and [illegible] camp [illegible] but [illegible]

[illegible] to find [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

As every available building was occupied by troops, the rangers, as usual, were treated as "outsiders," and compelled to take to the grass. Half a mile from the town, a spot was shown us for our camp. It was on the banks of a pretty rivulet; and there, having picketed our steeds, stretched our canvas to the sun, and washed the dust from our faces, we made ourselves at home

I did not remain long by the camp. As soon as our tents were fairly pitched, I left them, and walked back into the town —partly to get more definite information as to the future movements of the army, and partly with the design of indulging a little in the social feeling. I had some old comrades among the different regiments of the division; and after such a long spell of rustication, I was not indisposed to refresh my spirit by the renewal of former fellowships.

At head-quarters, I learned definitely that we should not march for a week at the least. So far good; and after hearing this, I proceeded to the *fonda*, the rendezvous of all the jovial spirits of the army. Here I encountered the friends of whom I was in search; and for a short while I found respite from the thoughts that had been harrowing me.

I soon gathered the current "camp gossip," and learned who were the "newspaper heroes" of the hour over many of whose names my friends and I could not restrain either our satire or laughter. It appeared that the men of deeds were scarcely known beyond the limits of the army itself, while others, who in the field of battle had actually played the poltroon, had at home become household words in the mouths of the people. One general, whom I myself saw hiding in a ditch, during the rage of battle was the theme of speech, sentiment, and song. The newspapers were filled with praises, and the windows with pictures of a "gallant dragoon officer," who had somehow obtained the credit of capturing a battery. My rangers cried "Bah!" when I told them this. They themselves were the men who had first galloped over those Mexican guns!

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"Keeping an editor in pay" was a standing sarcasm applicable to more than one of our generals; and the "army correspondent" taking advantage of this pruriency for fame, lived well, and swaggered in proportional importance.

Ah, glory! what sacrifices men make for thee upon the shrine of conscience! For my part, I do not think I could feel happy under the credit of a feat I had not performed. Surely the consciousness of having done a deed is of itself a sufficient reward. He is but an unhappy hero who is not a hero to himself!

Pleasanter gossip I heard about the relations existing between our troops and the people of the town. Many of the inhabitants had grown quite *Ayankieado*, in consequence of our excellent behavior towards them. Our conduct was compared with that which they had lately experienced at the hands of their own army. The latter is in the habit of seizing property at pleasure, on pretence of using it for the defence of the state. We, on the contrary, pay for everything—round prices too—in bright American dollars. The ricos and merchants prefer this system, and would have no objections to making it permanent. Outrages are few on the part of our soldiery, and severely punished by the general. Our enemies contrast the modest bearing of the American soldier with the conceited strut and insolent swagger of their own gold bedizened *militarios* who are wont on all occasions to "take the wall," of them. It is only outside the lines, between stragglers and leperos, that the retaliation system is carried on so fiercely. Within the walls, everything is order, with a mildness too rare under martial law. Private property is strictly regarded, and private dwellings are not occupied by our troops. Even the officers are not billeted in private houses; and many of them have to make shift in rather uncomfortable quarters, while most of the soldiers live under canvas. This state of things is scarcely satisfactory to the troops; and some grumbling is heard. There is no com

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plaint, however from the Mexicans, who seem rather astonished at so much forbearance on the part of their conquerors.

I doubt whether in the whole history of war can be found a conquest characterized by equal mildness and humanity, as is the "Second Conquest of Mexico."

It is principally for this reason the people have grown so well affected towards us. But there is another, perhaps, not less potent. From the extensive operations we are now about to undertake, they see that we mean war in earnest; and the belief has become general, that a large "annexation" will follow; that perhaps the whole valley of the Rio Grande will become American territory. It is but human nature in them to do homage to the rising sun.

The ricos are better disposed towards us than the common people; but this enigma is easily explained. The latter are more *patriotic*—that is, more ready to fight for native tyranny than accept freedom from a foreign hand. 'Tis so in all lands. In the event of a war with England, the black slave of Carolina would range himself by the side of his master, and prove the bitterest foe to the enemies not of his *freedom* but of his *country*.

The *familias principales* of Mexico have good reasons for being friendly to us. They have a stake to lose, which, under their own government has been ill guarded for them. No wonder they should desire to come under the broad protecting wings of the northern eagle. * * * *

I found that another species of "annexation" had been going on during my absence. One of our officers had become annexed to a wealthy señorita of the place, and the marriage ceremony had been performed with great pomp and splendor. Another was talked of as being *fiancé*; and it was expected that the example would find numerous imitators.

I need not say that I was much interested by these *novedades*, and I returned with lighter heart to the camp.

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CHAPTER LIV.

THE RUINED RANCHO.

The pleasant excitement caused by my visit to my old comrades was soon over; and having nothing to do but lounge about my tent, I became again the victim of the same painful bodings. I could not shake them off.

Subtle and mysterious is the spirit-world within us, certainly does it seem to have prescience of the future. Is it an electric chain connecting what is with what is to be? Or is it the second sight of instinct! Certainly there are times when something within whispers a warning, as in the physical world, God's wild creatures are warned from without of the earthquake and the storm. How often do we experience the realizations of portentous dreams? Why should not the waking soul have also its moments of clairvoyance?

As I lay stretched upon my leathern *catré*, I gave way to such reflections. I soon succeeded in reasoning myself into a full belief in foreknowledge; and my apprehensions were proportionately strengthened. But I had conceived a design, and the prospect of putting it in execution somewhat relieved me from the heaviness I had hitherto felt.

My new project was to take a score of my best men, to ride back the road we had come, place the party in ambush near the hacienda, while I alone should enter the house, and further urge the counsels I had committed to writing. If I should find that these had been already followed, so much the better—I should be assured, and return content; but I felt almost certain that Don Ramon had rejected them. At all events I was determined

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to know the truth—determined, moreover, to gratify my longing for one more interview with my beloved.

I had warned the men and fixed the hour—as soon as it was dark enough to conceal our departure from the camp.

I had two reasons for not starting earlier; first, because I did not wish this *private scouting* to be known at head-quarters. It is true that in such matters we rangers had the advantage of regular troops. Though belonging to the division, our duty was usually detached from it, and we were rarely "missed" when absent. There was thus a sort of pleasant independence in my command, which I for one fully appreciated For all that, I did not desire the whole world to know of an expedition like the one projected.

My second motive for going in the night was simple prudence I dared not take the whole of my command along with me, without permission from above. The absence of the corps without leave would certainly be noticed, even were it but for a few hours; and with the smaller party I intended to take, caution would be requisite. Should we move along the road before it was deserted, some swift messenger might carry the tidings *en avant*, and get us into trouble.

I designed to start at the earliest hour of darkness, so that I might not alarm the hacienda by a midnight visit. An hour and a half of constant riding would bring me to its gate. * *

At the last moment of twilight we were inour saddles; and rode silently into the chaparral that skirted our camp. After filing for some distance through a narrow path, we debouched upon the up-river road, the same that conducted to the rancheria.

The trappers, Rube and Garey, acting as scouts, went forward in the advance. They were on foot—their horses remaining behind with the party.

It was a mode of march I had adopted after some experience in bush-fighting. The scouts of a marching force should always go on foot, whether the main body be dragoons or infantry. In

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this manner they can take advantage of the ground; and by keeping under cover of the timber, are enabled to reconnoitre the angles of the road in a much safer way than when on horseback. The great danger to a scout—and consequently to the party for which he is acting—lies in his being *first* seen, and the risk is greater when he is mounted. The horse cannot be drawn under cover without an effort; and the sound of the hoof may be heard; whereas, in nine cases out of ten, a man on foot—that is, such a man as either Rube Rawlings or Bill Garey—will discover the enemy before he is himself seen, or any ambuscade can be attempted. Of course, the scout should never advance beyond the possibility of retreating upon the party he is guiding.

With full confidence in the men who had been sent forward, we rode on, timing our pace, so as not to overtake them. Now and then we caught a glimpse of them, at the further end of a long stretch, skirting the bushes, or stooping behind the cover, to reconnoitre the road in advance. To our chagrin, it was clear moonlight, and we could distinguish their forms at a great distance. We should much have preferred a darker night.

The road we were travelling upon was entirely without habitations; most of it ran through light chaparral forest, with neither clearing nor homestead. One solitary *rancho* stood at about equal distances between the town and the rancheria; and was known among the rangers by the familiar sobriquet of the "half-way-house." It was a poor hovel of yucca, with a small patch around that had once grown yams, chile-pepper, and a stock of maize for whoever had inhabited it; but its occupants had long since disappeared—the prowling soldier-robber from the camp had paid it many a visit, and its household gods lay broken upon the hearth. The *tortilla* stone and *comal*, red earthen ollas, calabash cups, bedsteads and benches of the *caña vaquera* a whirligig spindle, an old stringless *jarana* or bandolon, with other like effects, lay in fragments upon the floor. Mingling with these were cheap colored wood-prints, of saints and Saviour

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that had been dragged from the walls, and with the torn leaves of an old Spanish *misa*, trampled in dust and dishonor.

I paint this tableau of ruin not that it was in any way connected with the events of our narrative, but that it had strangely affected me. On the day before, as we rode past, I had halted a moment by the little rancho, and contemplated the scene with a feeling of melancholy that amounted almost to sadness. Little thought I that a still sadder spectacle awaited me in that same spot.

We had approached within less than half a mile of the rancho, when a strange medley of sounds reached our ears. Human voices they were, and borne upon the light breeze we could distinguish them to be the voices of women. Occasionally harsher tones were heard mingling in the murmur, but most of them had the soft rich intonation that distinguishes the female voice.

We all drew bridle and listened. The sounds continued in the same confused chorus, but there was neither song nor joy in the accents. On the contrary, the night-wind carried upon its wings the voices of "lamentation and wailing."

"There are women in trouble," remarked one of my followers in a loud sugestive tone.

The remark caused all of us simultaneously to ply the spur, and ride forward.

Before we had galloped a dozen lengths, a man appeared coming from the opposite direction, and advancing rapidly up the middle of the road. We saw it was the scout Garey; and, once more reining up, we awaited his approach.

I was at the head of the little troop, and as the trapper drew near, I could see his face full under the light of the moon. Its expression was ominous of evil tidings.

He spoke not until he had laid his hand upon the pommel of my saddle, and then only in a subdued and saddened tone. His words were:

"Thar's ugly news, capt'n."

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O that terrible foreboding!

"News?—ill news!" I stammered out; "what, for Heaven's sake?—speak, Garey!"

"They've been playin' the devil at the rancherie. Them ruffians hez behaved wuss than Injuns would a done. But come forrard, capt'n, and see for yorself. The weemen are close by hyar at the shanty. Rube's a tryin' to pacify them, poor critters."

O that terrible foreboding!

I made no response to Garey's last speech, but rode forward as fast as my horse could carry me.

A brace of minutes brought me up to the rancho and there I beheld a spectacle that caused the blood to curdle in my veins.

CHAPTER LV.

A CRUEL PROSCRIPTION.

The open space in front of the hovel was occupied by a group of women, most of them young girls. There were six or seven; I did not count them. There were two or three men, Mexicans, mixed up in the group. Rube was in their midst, endeavoring in their broken Spanish, to give them consolation, and assurance of safety. Poor victims! they needed both.

The women were half-naked—some of them simply *en chemise* Their long black hair fell loosely over their shoulders, looking tossed wet, and draggly. There was blood upon it; there was blood upon their cheeks in seams half-dried, but still dropping The same horrid red mottled their necks and bosoms, and there

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was blood upon the hands that had wiped them. A red brown blotch appeared upon the foreheads of all. In the moonlight, it looked as if the skin had been burnt. I rode closer to one and examined it; it was a brand—the fire-stamp of red-hot iron. The skin around was scarlet, but in the midst of this halo of inflammation I could distinguish, from their darker hue, the outlines o. the two letters I wore upon my button—the well known "U. S."

She who was nearest me raised her hands, and tossing back from her cheeks the thick clustered hair, cried out:

"*Miralo, señor!*"

O Heaven! my flesh crept as I looked upon the source of that crimson hemorrhage. Her ears had been clipped off—they were wanting!

I needed no farther uplifting of their hair to satisfy me that the others had been served in like manner; the red stream still trickling adown their necks was evidence enough. The men, too had been similarly abused. Two of them had suffered still further mutilation. They held held up their right arms before my face—not their hands. *There were no hands.* I saw the hanging sleeve and the blood steeped bandage on the stump. Their hands had been chopped off at the wrists. Horrid sight!

Both men and women gathered around me, clasping my knees, and uttering prayers and entreaties. No doubt most of them were known to me by sight; but their features were now unrecognizable. They had been the friends and sweethearts of the corps and my followers were already addressing them by name The lovers of one or two were present, and embraced them.

One appeared more richly costumed than the rest, and upon her my eye had fallen, as I first rode up. I almost dreaded to approach her, as she stood a little apart; but no—it could not be—she was not tall enough; besides the ruffians would not dare"——

"Your name, señorita?"

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"*Conchita, Señor—la hija del alcaldé.*"

The tears burst from her eyes, mingling with blood as they ran down her cheeks. Oh, that I too could have wept! Poor Wheatley! he was not with us. He had yet to receive the blow: it would soon fall.

My heart was on fire; so were those of my followers. They swore and foamed at the mouth. Some drew pistols and knives, calling me to lead them on. Never saw I men in such a frenzy of rage: the most cold-blooded among them seemed to have suddenly gone mad.

I could scarcely restrain them, till we should hear the tale. We guessed it already; but we needed some details to assist us in executing vengeance. It was told by many mouths, interrupting or confirming one another. One of the men was more coherent—Pedro, who used to sell mezcal to the troop. To him we listened. The substance of his story was as follows:

Shortly after we had left the rancheria, it was entered by the guerrilleros with cries of "*Viva Santa Anna! Viva Mexico!*" and "*Death to the Yankees!*" They commenced by breaking open several *tiendas*, and drinking mezcal and whatever they could find. They were joined by the mob of the place—by *leperos*, and others. Pedro noticed the *herredero* (blacksmith) and the *matador* (cattle-killer) taking a conspicuous part. There were many women in the mob—the mistresses of the guerrilleros, and others of the town.

After drinking a while, they grew more excited. Then was heard the cry; "*Mueran los Ayankieados!*" and the crowd scattering in different directions entered the houses, shouting, *Saquenlos afuera! matenlos!*" (Drag them out! kill them!) The poor girls and all who had been friendly to the *Americanos* were dragged into the plaza amidst the oaths and execrations of the guerrilla, and hisses and hootings from the mob. They were spat upon, called by filthy names, pelted with mud and melon-rinds, and then some of the crowd cried out to *mark* them

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so that their friends the *Tejanos* should know them again. The women were more furious than the men, and excited the latter to the deed, calling to the blacksmith :

"*Traiga el fierro! traiga el fierro!*" (Bring the branding iron !)

Others cried out : "*Sacan las orejas!*" (Cut off their ears !)

The brutal blacksmith and butcher, both half drunk, obeyed the call—willingly, Pedro alleged. The former used the branding-iron, already prepared, while the latter performed his bloody office with the knife of his trade !

Most of the guerrilleros wore masks. The leaders were all masked, and watched the proceedings from the roof of the alcaldé's house. One Pedro knew in spite of his disguise ; he knew him by his great size and red hair ; it was the *salteador*, El Zorro. Others he guessed at ; but he had no doubt it was the band of Don Rafael Ijurra—nor had we.

Had they left the rancheria before Pedro and the others came away ?

Pedro thought not ; he and the other victims, as soon as they got out of the hands of the mob, had fled to the chaparral, and were making for the American camp when met by our scouts. They were straggling along the road one after the other ; Rube had detained them by the rancho, till we should come up.

Pedro feared that they were not all—that there were other victims ; the alcaldé, he feared, had been worse than mutilated—he had been *murdered*.

This last information the poor fellow imparted in a whisper—at the same time casting a sorrowful look towards Conchita. I had not the courage to inquire farther.

The question arose whether we should send back for more men, and wait till they arrived, or advance at once to the rancheria The former was negatived with unanimous voice. We were

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strong enough, and vengeance was impatient. I was joyed by the decision ; *I* could not have waited.

The women were directed to continue on to the ranger-camp, Pedro, mounted behind one of the men, should go with us. W needed him for purposes of *identification.*

We were about to move forward, when a figure appeared along the road in the direction we were going to take. On coming within sight of us, the figure was seen to skulk and hide in the bushes. Rube and Garey ran rapidly forward, and in a few minutes returned bringing with them a Mexican youth—another of the victims !

He had left the scene of his sufferings somewat later than the rest.

Was the guerrilla still in the place ?

No ; they were gone from the village.

" Whither ?" was the anxious interrogatory.

They had taken the up-river road *towards the hacienda de Vagas.* They had passed the boy as he lay concealed among some aloes ; he had heard their cries as they rushed past.

" What cries ?"

They shouted : " *Mueran al traidor y traidora ! Mueran al padre y hija. Isolina la p—t—a* "

" O merciful God !"

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CHAPTER LVI.

THE BIVOUAC OF THE GUERRILLA.

I STAYED to hear no more, but drove the spurs against the ribs of my horse, till he sprang in full gallop along the road. Eager as were my men to follow, 'twas as much as they could do to keep up.

We no longer thought of scouts or cautious marching. The trappers had mounted, and were galloping with the rest. We thought only of *time*.

We rode for the hacienda de Vargas, straight up the river. Although it was beyond the rancheria, we could reach it without passing through the latter—which lay some distance back from the stream. We could return to the village afterwards, but first for the hacienda. There I wished to arrive in the shortest time possible. The miles flew behind us, like the dust of the road.

Oh, should we not be in time! I feared to calculate the length of the interval since the boy had heard that rabble rout. Was it more than an hour? Five miles to the rancho, and he on foot. Had he travelled rapidly? Yes, here and there; but he had made a stop: some men had passed him, and he had hidden in the bushes till they were out of sight. He had been more than an hour on the way—nearly two, and one would be enough for the execution of the darkest deed. Oh, we should not arrive in time!

There was no delay now. We were going at top speed, and in silence, scarcely exchanging a word. Alone might be heard the clattering of hoofs, the clinking of bits, or the ringing of

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steel scabbards. Neither the slimy gutter nor the deep rut of *carreta* wheels stayed our advance; our horses leaped over, or went sweltering through them.

In five minutes we came to the *rinconada*, where the road forked—the left branch leading to the village. We saw no one, and kept on by the right, the direct road to the hacienda. Another mile, and we should reach the house; a quarter of that distance, and we should come in sight of it; the trees alone hindered our view of its walls. On—on!

What means that light? Is the sun rising in the West? Is the chaparral on fire? Whence comes the yellow gleam, half intercepted by the trunks of the trees? It is not the moon!

"Ho! the hacienda is in flames!"

"No—it cannot be! A house of stone, with scarcely enough timber to make a blaze! It cannot be that!"

It is not that. We emerge from the forest; the hacienda is before our eyes. Its white walls gleam under a yellow light—the light of fire, but not of a conflagration. The house stands intact. A huge bon-fire burns in front of the portal; it was this that caused the glare through the forest.

We draw up, and gaze upon it with surprise. We behold a huge pile—the material supplied from the household stack of dry fagots—a vast blaze drowning the pale moonshine. We can see the hacienda, and all around it, as distinctly as by the light of day!

For what purpose this holocaust of crackling acacias?

Around the fire we behold many forms, living and moving. There are men, women, dogs and saddled horses. Huge joints are roasting over the red coals, and others, roasted, are being greedily eaten. Are they savages who surround that blazing pile? No—we can see their faces with full distinctness, the white skins and black beards of the men, the cotton garments of the women; we can see sombreros and serapés, cloth cloaks and calzoneros of velveteen, sashes and sabres; we can distin

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,ush their voices as they shout, sing and carouse; we note their lascivious movements in the national dance—the *fandango.* No Indians they! 'Tis a bivouac of the guerrilleros—the ruffians for whom we are in search.

O, that I had listened to the voice of prudence, and adopted the strategy of a surround! But my blood was boiling, and I feared to lose even a moment of time, lest we might be too late. But one or two of my followers counselled delay, and, as the event proved, they were the wisest. The rest, like myself, were impatient for action.

The word was given, and like hounds, fresh loosed from the leash, we rushed forward with charging cheer.

It was the madness of fools. Well knew our enemy the hoarse Texan "hurrah!" It had been shouted to terrify them, when there was no need. They would never have stood ground.

The shout warned them, causing them to scatter like a herd of deer. The steep hill proved too heavy for our horses; and before we could reach its summit, the main body of the guerrilla had mounted, and scampered off into the darkness. Six of them fell to our shots, and as many more, with their she-associates, remained prisoners in our hands; but as usual that subtle coward had contrived to escape. Pursuit was idle! they had taken to the dark woods beyond the hill.

I thought not of pursuit; my mind was bent on a far different purpose.

I rode into the *patio.* The court was lit up by the glare of the fire. It presented a picture of ruin. Rich furniture was scattered about in the veranda and over the pavement, broken or tumbled down. I called her name—the name of Don Ramon. Loudly and earnestly did I raise my voice, but echo gave the only reply.

I dismounted, and rushed into the veranda, still vociferating, and still without receiving a response I hurried from room to

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room—from *cuarto* to *sala*—from sala to *saguan*—up to the azotea—everywhere—even to the *capilla* in the rear. The moonbeams gleamed upon the altar, but no human form was there. The whole house was deserted; the domestics—even the women of the cocina—had disappeared. My horse and I seemed the only living things within those walls—for my followers had remain outside with their prisoners.

A sudden hope gleamed across my heart. Perhaps they had taken my counsel, and gone off before the mob appeared! Heaven grant it might be so!

I rushed out to question the captives. They should know, both men and women: they could certainly tell me.

A glance showed me I was too late to receive information from the men. A large *pecan* tree stood at one corner of the building. The firelight glared upon it; from its branches hung six human forms with drooping heads, and feet far from the earth. They had just ceased to live!

One told me that the herrodero was among them, and also the cruel matador. Pedro had identified both. The others were *pelados* of the town, who had borne part in the affair of the day. Their judges had made quick work, and equally quick had been the ceremony of execution. Lazos had been reeved over the limbs of the pecan, and with these all six had been jerked up without shrift or prayer!

It was not revenge for which I panted. I turned to the women; many of these had made off, but there were still a dozen or more in the hands of the men. They looked haggard with drink; some sullen, and some terrified. They had reason to be afraid.

In answer to my questions, they shook their heads, but gave me no information. Some remained doggedly silent; others denied all knowledge of Don Ramon or his daughter. Threats had no effect. They either knew not, or *feared to tell* what had befallen them. O heaven! could it be the latter?

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I was turning away angered and despairing, when my eyes fell upon a figure that seemed to skulk under the shadow of the walls. A shout of joy escaped as I recognized the boy Cyprio; he was just emerging from his place of concealment.

"Cyprio!" I cried.

"*Si, señor,*" answered he, advancing rapidly to where I stood.

"Tell me, Cyprio, where are they gone—where—where?"

"*Carrai, señor!* these bad men have carried the *dueño* away; I do not know whither."

"The señora? the señora?"

"Oh! *cavallero, es una cosa espantosa!*" (It is a terrible thing.)

"Quick, tell me all! Quickly Cyprio!"

"Señor, there came men with black masks, who broke into the house and carried off the master; then they dragged out Doña Isolina into the patio! *Ay de mi!* I cannot tell you what they did before—*pobre señorita!* There was blood running down her neck and all over her breast: she was not dressed, and I could see it. Some went to the caballeriza, and led out the white horse—the steed that was brought from the *llanos*. Upon his back they bound Doña Isolina. *Valga me dios!* such a sight!"

"Go on!"

"Then, señor, they led the horse across the river, and out to the plain beyond. All went along, to see the sport, as they said—*ay de mi!* such sport! I did not go, for they beat and threatened to kill me; but I saw all from the hill-top, where I had hidden myself in the bushes. *O Santisima Maria!*"

"Go on!"

"Then señor, they stuck *cohetes* in the hips of the horse, and set them on fire, and pulled off the bridle, and the steed went off, with fire-rockets after him, and Doña Isolina tied down upon his back—*pobre señorita!* I could see the horse till he was far, far

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away upon the *llano*, and then I could see him no more. *Dios de mi almo! la niña esta perdida!*" (Alas the young lady is lost.)

"Some water! Rube! Garey! friends—water! water!"——

I made an attempt to reach the fountain in the patio; but, after staggering dizzily a pace or two, my strength failed me, and I fell fainting to the earth.

CHAPTER LVII.

TAKING THE TRAIL.

I HAD merely swooned. My nerves and frame were still weak from the blood-letting I had received in the combat of yesterday. The shock of the horid news was too much for my powers of endurance.

I was insensible only for a short while; the cold water revived me.

When consciousness returned, I was by the fountain, my back leaning against its parapet edge; Rube, Garey, and others were around me. From my dripping garments, I perceived that they had *douched* me, and one was pouring a fiery spirit down my throat. There were men on horseback, who had ridden into the patio—the iron hoofs causing the court to ring. They were rangers, but not those who had left camp in my company. Some had arrived since, and others were still galloping up. Those girls had reached the ranger camp, and told their tale. The men had not waited for orders, or even for one another, but rushing to their horses, took the road in twos and threes. Every moment, a horseman, or several together, came riding

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forward in hot haste, carrying their rifles, as if ready for action, and uttering loud cries of indignation.

Wheatley had arrived among the foremost. Poor fellow! his habitual buoyancy had departed; the gay smile was gone from his lips. His eyes were on fire, and his teeth set in the stern expression of heart-consuming vengeance.

Amidst the hoarse shouting of the men, I heard screaming in the shriller voices of women. It came from without.

I rose hastily, and ran towards the spot: I saw several of the wretched captives stripped to the waist, and men in the act of flogging them, with mule-quirts and pieces of raw hide rope.

I had feared it was worse; I had feared that their captors were inflicting upon them a *retaliation in kind*. But no—angry as were my followers, they had not proceeded to such a fiendish extremity.

It required all the authority of a command to put an end to this distressing spectacle. They desisted at length, and the screeching and affrighted wretches were permitted to take themselves away—all disappearing rapidly beyond the light of the fire.

At this crisis, a shout was raised: "To the rancheria, to the rancheria!" and instantly a party, with Wheatley and Holingsworth at its head, rode off for the village. Pedro went along with them.

I waited not for their return; I had formed a plan of action for myself, that would admit of no delay in its execution.

At first, stunned by the blow, and the distraction of my swooning senses, I had not been able to *think*; as soon as the confusion passed, and I could reflect more clearly, the course I ought to pursue was at once apparent. Vengeance I had felt as the first impulse, and a strong desire to follow up the fiend Ijurra—night and day to follow him—though the pursuit should lead me into the heart of the hostile ground.

This was but a momentary impulse: vengeance must be stifled

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for the time. A path was to be taken that widely diverged from that of the retreating guerrilla—*the trail of the white steed.*

Mounting Cyprio, and choosing from my band half a dozen of the best *trackers*, was the work of a moment. In another, we were in the saddle; and descending the hill, we plunged rapidly through the stream, crossed the skirting timber, and soon reached the open prairie.

Under Cyprio's guidance, we found the spot desecrated by that cruel display. The ground was trampled by many hoofs; fragments of paper—powder blackened—broken rocket-sticks, and half-burnt fuses, strewed the sward—the pyrotechnic *reliquiæ* of the fiendish spectacle.

We halted not there. By the aid of our guide and the moonlight, we rode clear of the confusion; and taking up the trail of the horse, struck off upon it, and were soon far out upon the prairie.

For more than a mile we advanced at a gallop. Time was everything. Trusting to the intelligence of the Mexican boy, we scarcely scrutinized the track, but made directly for the point where the horse had been last seen.

Cyprio's information did not deceive us. A *motte* of timber had served him as a mark: the steed had passed close to its edge. Beyond it, he had seen him no more.

Beyond it, we found the tracks, easily recognizable by Rube, Garey, and myself There was a peculiarity by which we were prevented from mistaking them: three of the prints were clearly cut in the turf—almost perfect circles—the curve of the fourth—of the fore-foot—was interrupted by a slight indentation, where a piece had been broken from the hoof. It had been done in that terrible leap upon the rocky bed of the barranca.

Taking the trail again, we kept on—now advancing at a slower pace, and with a greater degree of caution. Late rains had moistened the prairie-turf and we could perceive the tracks

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without dismounting At intervals there were stretches of drier surface, where the hoofs had scarcely left its impression. In such places, one leaped from the saddle, and led the way on foot. Rube or Garey usually performed this office ; and so rapidly did they move along the trail, that our horses were seldom in a walk. With bodies half bent, and eyes gliding along the ground, they pressed forward like hounds running by the scent, but, unlike these, the trackers made no noise. Not a word was spoken by any one. I had no list for speech ; my agony was too intense for utterance.

With Cyprio I had conversed upon the harrowing theme, and that only at starting. From him I had gath r further details. No doubt, the matador had performed his office. O God ! without ears !

Cyprio had seen blood ; it was streaming adown her neck and over her bosom ; her slight garments were stained red with it. He knew not whence it came, or why she was bleeding. He was not present when that blood had been drawn ; it was in her chamber, he thought. She was bleeding when the ruffians dragged her forth.

Belike, too, the herrero had done his work ? Cyprio had seen the blacksmith, but not the *fierro*. He heard they had branded some at the plaza, among others the daughter of the alcaldé—*pobre Conchita !* He did not see them brand the Doña Isolina.

The ruffian deed might have been accomplished for all that ; there was plenty of time, while the boy lay hid.

How was she placed upon the horse ?

Despite my heart's bitterness, as I put these interrogatories, I could not help thinking of the Cossack legend. The famed classic picture came vividly before my mind. Wide was the distance between the Ukraine and the Rio Bravo. Had the monsters who re-enacted this scene on the banks of the Mexican river—had these ever heard of Mazeppa ? Possibly their leader

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had; but still more probable that the fiendish thought was original.

The fashion at least was. Cyprio had seen and could describe it.

She was laid longitudinally upon the back of the steed, her head resting upon the point of his shoulder. Her face was downward, her cheek touching the withers. Her arms embraced the neck, and her wrists were made fast under the animal's throat. Her body was held in position by means of a belt around her waist, attached to a surcingle on the horse—both tightly buckled. In addition to this, her ankles, bound together by a thong, were fastened to the croup, with her feet projecting beyond the hips!

I groaned as I listened to the details.

The ligature was perfect—cruelly complete. There was no hope that such fastenings would give way. Those thongs of raw-hide would not come undone. Horse and rider could never part from that unwilling embrace—never, till hunger, thirst, death—no, not even death could part them! O horror!

Not without groans could I contemplate the hideous fate of my betrothed—of her whose love had become my life.

I left the tracking to my comrades, and my horse to follow after. I rode with loose rein, and head drooping forward; I scarcely gave thought to design. My heart was well-nigh broken.

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CHAPTER LVIII.

THE VOYAGEUR.

We had not gone far when some one closed up beside me, and muttered a word of cheer; I recognized the friendly voice of the big trapper.

"Don't be afeerd, cap'n," said he in a tone of encouragement; "don't be afeerd! Rube an me'll find 'em afore thar's any harm done. I don't b'lieve the white hoss 'll gallip fur, knowin thar's someb'dy on his back. It war them gim-cracks that sot him off. When they burn out, he'll come to a dead halt, an then"——

"And then?" I inquired mechanically.

"We'll get up, an your black'll be able to overhaul him in a jump or two."

I began to feel hope. It was but a momentary gleam, and died out in the next instant.

If the moon 'ud only hold out," continued Garey, with an emphasis denoting doubt.

"Rot the moon!" said a voice interrupting him; "she's gwine to guv out. Wagh!"

It was Rube who had uttered the unpleasant prognostication in a peevish, but confident tone.

All eyes were turned upward. The moon, round and white, was sailing through a cloudless sky, and almost in the zenith. How, then, was she to "give out?" She was near the full, and could not set before morning. What did Rube mean? The question was put to him.

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"Lookee 'ander!" said he in reply. "D'ees see thet ur black line, down low on the paraira?"

There appeared a dark streak along the horizon to the eastward. Yes, we saw it.

"Wal," continued Rube, "thur's no timber thur—ne'er a stick—nor high groun neyther: thet ur's a cloud; I've seed the likes afore. Wait a bit. Wagh! In jest ten minutes, the durned thing'll kiver up the moon, and make thet pretty blue sky look as black as the hide 'o an Afrikin niggur—*it* will."

"I'm afeerd he's right, cap'n," said Garey, in a desponding tone. "I war doubtful o' it myself: the sky looked too *near*. I didn't like it a bit: thar's always a change when things are better'n common."

I needed not to inquire the consequences, should Rube's prediction prove correct; that was evident to all of us. The moon once obscured by clouds, our progress would be arrested: even a horse could not be tracked in the darkness.

We were not long in suspense. Again the foresight of the old trapper proved unerring. Cumuli rolled up the sky one after another, until their black masses shrouded the moon. At first, they came only in detached clouds, and there was light at intervals; but these were only the advanced columns of a heavier body, that soon appeared, and without a break, spread itself pall-like over the firmament.

The moon's disc became entirely hidden from our view; her scattered beams died out, and the prairie lay dark as if shadowed by an eclipse.

We could follow the trail no further. The ground itself was not visible, much less the hoof-prints we had been tracing; and halting simultaneously, we drew our horses together, and sat in our saddles to deliberate upon what was best to be done.

The consultation was a short one. They who formed that little party were all men of prairie or backwoods experience, and well versed in the ways of the wilderness. It took them but

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little time to decide what course should be followed; and they were unanimous in their opinion. Should the sky continue clouded, we must give up the pursuit till morning, or adopt the only alternative—follow the trail up by *torch-light.*

Of course the latter was determined upon. It was yet early in the night; many hours must intervene before we should have the light of day. I could not live through these long hours without action. Even though our progress might be slow, the knowledge that we were advancing would help to stifle the painfulness of reflection.

"A torch! a torch!"

Where was such a thing to be procured? We had with us no material with which to make one; there was no timber near! We were in the middle of a naked prairie. The universal mezquite—the *algar obia glandulosa*—excellent for such a purpose, grew nowhere in the neighborhood. Who was to find the torch? Even Rube's ingenuity could not make one out of nothing.

"Ecoutez, mon capitaine!" cried Le Blanc, an old voyageur—"écoutez! vy me no ride back, et von lanterne bring from ze ville Mexicaine?"

True, why not? We were yet but a few miles from the rancheria. The Canadian's idea was a good one.

"Je connais," he continued—"know I, pe gar! ze ver spot où—vere—sont cachées—hid—les chandelles magnifiques—von, deux, tree big candles—vax—vax."——

"Wax candles?"

"Oui—oui, messieurs! très grand comme un bâton; ze ver chose pour allumer la prairie"

"You know where they are? You could find them, Le Blanc?"

"Oui, messieurs—je connais: les chandelles sont cachées dans l'église—zey are in ze church hid."

"Ha! in the church?"

"Oui, messieurs; c'est un grand sacrilège, mon Dieu! ver

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bao ; mais n'importe cela. Eef mon capitaine permis, vill allow pour aller Monsieur Quack'bosh, he go chez moi ; nous cherch erons ; ve bring ze chandelles—pe gar we bring him !"

From the mixed gibberish of the voyageur, I could gather his meaning well enough. He knew of a depository of wax candles, and the church of the rancheria was the place in which they were kept. I was not in a frame of mind to care much for the sacrilege, and my companions were still less scrupulous. The act was determined upon, and Le Blanc and Quackenboss, without more delay, took the back-track for the village.

The rest of us dismounted, and picketing our horses to the grass, lay down to await the return of the messengers

CHAPTER LIX.

TRAILING BY TORCH-LIGHT.

While thus inactive, my mind yielded itself up to the contemplation of painful probabilities. Horrid spectacles passed before my imagination. I saw the white horse galloping over the plain, pursued by wolves, and shadowed by black vultures To escape these hungry pursuers, I saw him dash into the thick chaparral, to encounter the red panther or the fierce prowling bear—there to encounter the sharp thorns of the acacias, the barbed spines of the cactus, and the recurving claw-like armature of the wild aloes. I could see the red blood streaming adown his white flanks—not *his* blood, but that of the helpless victim stretched prostrate along his back. I could see the lacerated limbs—the ankles chafed and swollen—the garments torn to shreds—the drooping head—the long loose hair tossed and trailing to the earth—the white wan lips—the woe-bespeak

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ing eyes —— Oh! I could bear my reflections no longer. I sprang to my feet, and paced the prairie with the aimless unsteady step of a madman.

Again the kind-hearted trapper approached, and renewed his efforts to console me.

"We could follow the trail," he said, "by torch or candle light, almost as fast as we could travel; we should be many miles along it before morning; maybe before then we should get sight of the steed. It would not be hard to surround and capture him; now that he was half-tamed, he might not run from us; if he did, he could be overtaken. Once in view, we would not lose sight of him again. The saynyora would be safe enough; there was nothing to hurt her: the wolves would not know the "fix" she was in, neyther the "bars" nor "painters." We should be sure to come up with her before the next night, and would find her first rate; a little tired and hungry, no doubt, but nothing to hurt. We should relieve her, and rest would set all right again."

Notwithstanding the rude phrase in which these consolatory remarks were made, I appreciated the kind intent.

Garey's speech had the effect of rendering me more hopeful; and in calmer mood, I awaited the return of Quackenboss and the Canadian.

These did not linger. Two hours had been allowed them to perform their errand; but long before the expiration of that period, we heard the double trampling of their horses as they came galloping across the plain.

In a few minutes they rode up, and we could see in the hands of Le Blanc three whitish objects, that in length and thickness resembled stout walking-canes. We recognized *les chandelles magnifiques.*

They were the property of the church, designed no doubt to have illumined the altar upon the occasion of some grand *dia de fiesta.*

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"Voilà! mon capitaine!" cried the Canadian, as he rode forward, "voilà les chandelles! Ah, mon Dieu! c'est von big sacrilège, et je suis bon Chrétien—buen Catolico, as do call 'im ze dam Mexicaine; bien—ze bon Dieu we forgive—God ve pardon vill pour—for the grand necessitie; sure certaine he vill me pardon—Lige et moi—ze brave Monsieur Quack'bosh."

The messengers had brought news from the village. Some rough proceedings had taken place since our departure. Men had been punished; fresh victims had been found under the guidance of Pedro and others of the abused. The trees in the church enclosure that night bore horrid fruit.

The alcaldé was not dead; and Don Ramon, it was supposed, still survived, but had been carried off a prisoner by the guerrilla! The rangers were yet at the rancheria; many had been desirous of returning with Le Blanc and Quackenboss, but I had sent orders to the lieutenants to take all back to camp as soon as their affair was over. The fewer of the troop that should be absent, the less likelihood of our being missed, and those I had with me I deemed enough for my purpose. Whether successful or not, we should soon return to camp. It would then be time to devise some scheme for capturing the leader and prime actor in this terrible tragedy.

Hardly waiting to hear the story, we lighted the great candles, and moved once more along the trail.

Fortunately, the breeze was but slight, and only served to make the huge waxen torches flare more freely. By their brilliant blaze, we were enabled to take up the tracks, quite as rapidly as by the moonlight. At this point, the horse had been still going at full gallop; and his course, as it ran in a direct line, rendered it more easy to be followed.

Dark as the night was, we soon perceived we were heading for a point well known to all of us—the prairie mound; and, under a faint belief that the steed might have there come to a stop, we pressed forward with a sort of hopeful anticipation

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After an hour's tracking, the white cliffs loomed within the circle of our view, the shining selenite glancing back the light of our tapers, like a wall set with diamonds.

We approached with caution, still keeping on the trail, but also keenly scrutinizing the ground in advance of us—in hopes of perceiving the object of our search. Neither by the cliff, nor in the gloom around, was living form to be traced.

Sure enough the steed had halted there, or, at all events, ceased from his wild gallop. He had approached the mound in a walk, as the tracks testified ; but how, and in what direction had he gone thence ? His hoof-prints no longer appeared. He had passed over the shingle, that covered the plain to a distance of many yards from the base of the cliff, and no track could be found beyond.

Several times we went around the mesa, carrying our candles everywhere. We saw skeletons of men and horses with skulls detached, fragments of dresses, and pieces of broken armor—souvenirs of our late skirmish—we looked into our little fortress, and gazed upon the rock that had sheltered us ; we glanced up the gorge where we had climbed, and beheld the rope by which we had descended still hanging in its place : all these we saw, but no further traces of the steed !

Round and round we went, back and forward, over the stony shingle, and along its outer edge, but still without coming upon the tracks. Whither could the horse have gone !

Perhaps, with a better light, we might have found the trail; but for a long hour we searched, without striking upon any sign of it. Perhaps we might still have found it, even with our waxen torches, but for an incident that not only interrupted our search, but filled us with fresh apprehension, and almost stifled our hopes of success.

The interruption did not come unexpected. The clouds had for some time given ample warning. The big solitary drops that at intervals fell with plashing noise upon the rocks, were

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but the *avant-courriers* of one of the great rain storms of the prairie, when water descends as if from a shower-bath. We knew from the signs that such a storm was nigh; and while casting around to recover the trail, it commenced in all its fury.

Almost in an instant our lights were extinguished, and our bootless search brought to a termination.

We drew up under the rocks, and stood side by side in sullen silence. Even the elements seemed against me. In my heart's bitterness, I cursed them.

CHAPTER LX.

THE SOMBRERO.

The horses cowered under the cold rain, all of them jaded and hungry. The hot dusty march of the morning, and the long rough gallop of the night, had exhausted their strength and they stood with drooped heads and hanging ears, dozing and motionless.

The men, too, were wearied—some of them quite worn out. A few kept their feet, bridle in hand, under shelter of the impending cliff; the others, having staggered down, with their backs against the rock, had almost instantly fallen asleep.

For me was neither sleep nor rest; I did not even seek protection against the storm, but standing clear of the cliff, received the drenching shower full upon my shoulders. It was the chill rain of the "norther;" but at that moment neither cold *norte* nor hot sirocco could have produced upon me an impression of pain. To physical suffering I was insensible. I should even have welcomed it, for I well understood the truth, proverbially expressed in that language, rich above all others in proverbial

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lore—"*un clavo saca otro clavo*," and still more fully illustrated by the poet:

> Tristezas me hacen triste,
> Tristezas salgo a buscar,
> A ver si con tristezas
> Tristezas puedo olvidar.

Yes, under any other form, I should have welcomed physical pain as a neutralizer of my mental anguish; but that cold norther brought no consolation.

Sadly the reverse. It was the harbinger of keen apprehension; for not only had it interrupted our search, but should the heavy rain continue but for a few hours, we might be able neither to find or further to follow the trail. It would be *blinded*—obliterated—lost. Can you wonder that in my heart I execrated those black clouds, and that driving deluge?—that with my lips I cursed the sky and the storm, the moon and the stars, the red lightning and the rolling thunder?

My anathema ended, I stood in sullen silence leaning against the body of my brave horse, whose sides shivered under the chilly rain, though I felt not its chill.

Absorbed in gloomy thought, I recked not what was passing around me; and for an unnoted period I remained in this speechless abstraction.

My reverie was broken. Some expressions that reached my ear told me that at least two of my followers had not yielded to weariness or despair. Two of them were in conversation; and I easily recognized the voices of the trappers. Tireless, used to stern struggles—to constant warfare with the elements, with nature herself—these true men never thought of giving up, until the last effort of human ingenuity had failed. From their conversation, I gathered that they had not yet lost hope of finding the trail, but were meditating on some plan for recovering and following it.

With renewed eagerness I faced towards them and listened;

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both talked in a low voice. Garey was speaking, as I turned to them.

"I guess you're right, Rube. The hoss must a gone thar, an if so, we're boun' to fetch his tracks. Thar's mud, if I remember right, all roun' the pool. We can carry the candle under Dutch's sombrera."

"Ye-es," drawled Rube in reply; "an ef this niggur don't miskalk'late, we ain't a gwine to need eyther cannel or sombrairy. Lookee yander!"—the speaker pointed to a break in the clouds—"I'll stake high, I kin mizyure this hyur shower wi' the tail o' a goat. Wagh! we'll hev the moon agin, clur as iver, in the inside o' ten minnits—see ef we haint."

"So much the better, old hoss; but hadn't we best first try for the tracks? time's precious, Rube"——

"In coorse it ur; git the cannel an the sombrairy, an le's be off then. The rest of these fellurs had better stay hyur; thu'll only bamboozle us."

"Lige!" called out Garey, addressing himself to Quackenboss—"Lige! gi' us yur hat a bit."

A loud snore was the only reply. The ranger, seated with his back against the rock, and his head drooping over his breast, was sound asleep.

"Durned sleepyhead!" exclaimed Rube, in a tone of peevish impatience. "Prod 'im wi' the point o' yur bowie, Bill! Rib-roast 'im wi' yur wipin-stick! Lam 'im wi' yur laryette!—gi' 'im a kick i' the guts!—roust 'im up, durn 'im!"

"Lige!—ho!—Dutchy!" cried Garey, approaching the sleeper, and shaking him by the shoulder; 'I want your sombrera."

"Ho! wo! stand still! Jingo, he'll throw me. I can't get off; the spurs are locked. Ho! wo! wo!"

Rube and Garey broke into a loud cachinnation that awakened the rest of the slumberers. Quackenboss alone remained asleep fighting in his dreams with the wild Indian horse.

"Durned mulehead!" cried Rube, after a pause; "let 'im go

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ou at thet's long's he likes it. Chuck the hat off o' his head Bill! we don't want *him*—thet we don't."

There was a little pique in the trapper's tone. The breach that the ranger had made, while acting as a faithful sentinel, was not yet healed.

Garey made no further attempts to arouse the sleeper, but in obedience to the order of his comrade, lifted off the hat; and, having procured one of the great candles, he and Rube started off without saying another word, or giving any clue to their design.

Though joyed at what I had heard, I refrained from interrogating them. Some of my followers who put questions received only ambiguous answers. From the manner of the trappers, I saw that they wished to be left to themselves; and I could well trust them to the development of whatever design they had conceived.

On leaving us, they walked straight out from the cliff; but how far they continued in this direction it was impossible to tell. They had not lighted the candle; and after going half-a-dozen steps, their forms disappeared from our view amidst the darkness and thickly falling rain.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TRAIL RECOVERED.

The rangers, after a moment of speculation as to the designs of the trappers, resumed their attitude of repose. Fatigued as they were, even the cold could not keep them awake.

After a pause, the voice of Quackenboss could be heard, in proof that that heavy sleeper was at length aroused; the rain,

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falling upon his half bald skull, had been more effective than the shouts and shaking of Garey.

"Hillo! Where's my hat?" inquired he, in a mystified tone, at the same time stirring himself, and groping about among the rocks. "Where *is* my hat? Boys, did any o' ye see anything o' a hat, did ye?" His shouts again awoke the sleepers

"What sort of a hat, Lige?" inquired one.

"A black hat—that Mexican sombrera."

"Oh! a black hat; no—I saw no black hat."

"You darned Dutchman! who do you expect could see a black hat such a night as this, or a white one eyther? Go to sleep!"

"Come boys, I don't want none o' your nonsense: I want my hat. Who's got my hat?"

"Are you sure it was a black hat?"

"Bah! the wind has carried it away."

"Pe gar! Monsieur Quack'bosh—votre chapeau grand—you great beeg 'at—est il perdu?—is loss?—c'est vrai? Par dieu! les loups—ze wolfs have it carr'd away—have it mangé—est? c'est vrai!"

"None o' your gibberish, Frenchy. Have *you* got my hat?"

"Moi? votre chapeau grand! No, Monsieur Quack'bosh—vraiment je ne l'ai pas; pe gar, no!"

"Have *you* got it, Stanfield?" asked the botanist, addressing himself to a Kentucky backwoodsman of that name.

"Dang yer hat! What shed I do wi' yer hat? I've got my own hat, and that's hat enough for me."

"Have *you* my hat, Bill Black?"

"No," was the prompt reply; "I've got neery hat but my own, and that ain't black, I reckon, 'cept sich a night as this."

"I tell you what, Lige, old fellow! you lost your hat while you were a ridin' the mustang just now; the hoss kicked it off o your head."

A chorus of laughter followed this sally, in the midst of which

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Quackenboss could be heard apostrophizing both his hat and his comrades in no very respectful terms. He continued to scramble over the ground in vain search after the lost sombrero, amidst the jokes and laughter, uttered at his expense.

To this merriment of my followers I gave but little heed; my thoughts were intent on other things. My eyes were fixed upon that bright spot in the sky, that had been pointed out by Rube; and my heart gladdened, as I perceived that it was every moment growing brighter and bigger. The rain still fell thick and fast; but the edge of the cloud-curtain was slowly rising above the eastern horizon, as though drawn up by some invisible hand. Should the movement continue, I felt confident that in a few minutes—as Rube had predicted—the sky would be clear again, and the moon shining brightly as ever. These were joyous anticipations.

At intervals I glanced toward the prairie, and I listened to catch some sound—either the voices of the trappers, or the tread of their returning footsteps. No such sounds could be heard.

I was becoming impatient, when I perceived a sudden waif of light far out upon the plain. It seemed to be again extinguished, but in the same place, and the moment after, appeared a small, steady flame, twinkling like a solitary star through the bluish mist of the rain. For a few seconds it remained fixed, and then commenced moving—as if carried low down along the surface of the ground.

There was nothing mysterious about this lone light. To Quackenboss only it remained an unexplained apparition; and he might have mistaken it for the *fata morgana*. The others had been awake when Rube and Garey took their departure, and easily recognised the lighted candle in the hands of the trappers.

For some time the light appeared to move backwards and forwards, turning at short distances, or as if borne in irregular

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circles, or in zigzag lines. We could perceive the sheen of water between us and the flame, as though there was a pond, or perhaps a portion of the prairie, flooded by the rain.

After a while the light became fixed, and a sharp exclamation was heard across the plain, which all of us recognized as being in the voice of the trapper Rube. Again the light was in motion—now flitting along more rapidly, as if carried in a straight line across the prairie.

We followed it with eager eyes. We saw it was moving further and further away; and my companions hazarded the conjecture that the trappers had recovered the trail.

This was soon verified by one of themselves—Garey—whose huge form, looming through the mist, was seen approaching the spot; and though the expression of his face could not be noted in the darkness, his bearing betokened that he brought cheerful tidings.

"Rube's struck the trail, capt'n," said he in a quiet voice, as he came up: "yonder he goes, whar you see the bleeze o' the cannel! He'll soon be out o' sight, if we don't make haste, an follow."

Without another word we seized the reins, sprang once more into our saddles, and rode off after the twinkling star, that beaconed us across the plain.

Rube was soon overtaken, and we perceived that, despite the storm, he was rapidly progressing along the trail, his candle sheltered from the rain under the ample sombrero.

In answer to numerous queries, the old trapper vouchsafed only an occasional "Wagh," evidently proud of this new exhibition of his skill. With Garey, the curious succeeded better; and as we continued on, the latter explained to them how the trail had been recovered by his comrade—for to Rube, it appeared, was the credit due.

Rube remembered the mesa spring. It was the water in its branch that we had seen gleaming under the light. The thought

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ful trapper conjectured, and rightly as it proved, that the steed would stop there to drink. He had passed along the stony shingle by the mound—simply because around the cliff lay his nearest way to the water—and had followed a dry ridge that led directly from the mesa to the spring branch. Along this ridge, going gently at the time, his hoof had left no marks—at least none that could be distinguished by torch-light, and this was why the trail had been for the moment lost. Rube, however, remembered that around the spring there was a tract of soft, boggy ground; and he anticipated that in this the hoof prints would leave a deep impression. To find them he needed only a "kiver" for the candle, and the huge hat of Quackenboss offered the very thing. An umbrella would scarcely have been better for his purpose.

As the trappers had conjectured, they found the tracks in the muddy margin of the spring-branch. The steed had drunk at the pool; but immediately after had resumed his wild flight, going westward from the mound.

Why had he gone off at a gallop? Had he been alarmed by aught? Or had he taken fresh affright at the strange rider upon his back?

I questioned Garey. I saw that he knew why. He needed pressing for the answer.

He gave it at length, but with evident reluctance.

"Thar are wolf-traces on the rail."

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CHAPTER LXII.

WOLVES ON THE TRACK.

THE wolves, then, were after him!

The trackers had made out their footprints in the mud of the arroyo. Both kinds had been there—the large brown wolf of Texas, and the small barking *coyote* of the plains—a full pack there had been, as the trappers could tell by the numerous tracks. That they were following the horse, the tracks also testified to these men of strange intelligence. How knew they this? By what sign?

To my inquiries, I obtained answer from Garey.

Above the spring branch extended a shelving bank; up this the steed had bounded, after drinking at the pool. Up this, too, the wolves had sprung after: they had left the indentation of their claws in the soft loam.

How knew Garey that they were in pursuit of the horse?

The "scratches" told him they were going at their fastest, and they would not have sprung so far had they not been pursuing some prey. There were footmarks of no other animal except theirs and the hoof-prints of the steed; and that they were after him was evident to the trapper, because the tracks of the wolves *covered* those of the horse.

Garey had no more doubt of the correctness of his reasoning than a geometrician of the truth of a theorem in Euclid.

I groaned in spirit as I was forced to adopt his conclusion. But it was all probable—too probable. Had the steed been alone—unembarrassed—free—it was not likely the wolves would have chased him thus. The wild horse in his prime is rarely the

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object of their attack—though the old and infirm, the gravid mare, and the feeble colt, often fall before these hungry hunters of the plains. Both common wolf and coyote possess all the astuteness of the fox, and know, as if by instinct, the animal that is wounded to death. They will follow the stricken deer that has escaped from the hunter; but if it prove to be but slightly harmed, instinctively they abandon the chase.

Their instinct had told them that the steed was not ridden by a free hand; they had seen that there was *something amiss;* and in the hope of running down both horse and rider, they had followed with hungry howl.

Another fact lent probability to this painful conjecture: we knew that by the mesa were many wolves.

The spring was the constant resort of ruminant animals, deer and antelopes; the half-wild cattle of the *ganaderos* drank there, and the tottering calf oft became the prey of the coyote and his more powerful congener, the gaunt Texan wolf. There was still another reason why the place must of late have been the favorite prowl of these hideous brutes: the debris of our skirmish had furnished them with many a midnight banquet. They had ravened upon the blood of men and the flesh of horses, and they hungered for more.

That they might succeed in running down the steed, cumbered as he was, was probable enough. Sooner or later they would overtake him. It might be after a long, long gallop over hill and dale, through swamp and chaparral; but still it was probable those tough, tireless pursuers would overtake him. They would launch themselves upon his flanks; they would seize upon his wearied limbs—upon hers, the helpless victim upon his back: both horse and rider would be dragged to the earth—both torn—parted in pieces—devoured!

I groaned under the horrid apprehension.

"Look thar!" said Garey, pointing to the ground, and holding his torch so as to illuminate the surface; "the hoss has

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made a slip thar. See ! hyar's the track o' the big wolf—he has sprung up jest hyar ; I can tell by the scratch o' his hind-claws"

I examined the "sign." Even to my eyes it was readable, and just as Garey had interpreted it. There were other tracks of wolves on the damp soil, but one had certainly launched himself forward, in a long leap, as though in an effort to fasten himself upon the flanks of some animal. The hoof-mark plainly showed that the steed had slipped as he sprang over the wet ground ; and this had tempted the spring of the watchful pursuer

We hurried on. Our excited feelings hindered us from pausing longer than a moment. Both rangers and trappers shared my eagerness, as well as my apprehensions. Fast as the torches could be carried, we hurried on.

Shortly after parting from the mesa, there occurred a change in our favor. The lights had been carried under hats to protect them from the rain. This precaution was no longer required. The storm had passed—the shower ceasing as suddenly as it had come on ; the clouds were fast driving from the face of the firmament. In five minutes more, the moon would shine forth. Already her refracted rays lightened the prairie.

We did not stay for her full beam ; time was too precious Still trusting to the torches, we hurried on.

The beautiful queen of the night kept her promise. In five minutes, her cheering orb shot out beyond the margin of the dark pall that had hitherto shrouded it, and her white disc, as if purified by the storm, shone with unwonted brightness. The ground became conspicuous almost as in the day ; the torches were extinguished, and we followed the trail more rapidly by the light of the moon.

Here, still in full gallop, had passed the wild horse, and for miles beyond—still had he gone at utmost speed. Still close upon his heels had followed the ravenous and untiring wolves Here and there were the prints of their clawed feet—the signs of their unflagging pursuit.

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The roar of water sounded in our ears: it came from the direction in which the trail was conducting us; a stream was not far distant.

We soon diminished the distance A glassy sheet glistened under the moonlight. And towards this the trail tended in a straight line.

It was a river—a cataract was near, down which the water, freshened by the late rain, came tumbling, broken by the rocks into hummocks of white foam. Under the moonlight, it appeared like an avalanche of snow. The trappers recognized an affluent of the Rio Bravo, running from the north—from the high steppe of the Llano Estacado.

We hurried forward to its bank, and opposite the frothing rapids. The trail conducted us to this point—to the very edge of the foaming water. It led no further. There were the hoof-marks forward to the brink, but not back. The horse had plunged into the torrent.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ACROSS THE TORRENT.

Surely was it so. Into that seething rapid the steed had launched himself—where the spume was whitest, and the rocks gave out their hoarsest echoes. The four hoof-prints, close together upon the bank, showed the point from which he had prung, and the deeply indented turf testified that he had made no timid leap. The pursuers had been close upon his heels and he had flung himself with desperate plunge upon the water

Had he succeeded in crossing? It was our first thought. It appeared improbable—impossible. Notwithstanding its foam

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bedappled surface, the current was swift, and looked as though it would sweep either man or horse from his footing. Surely it was too deep to be forded. Though here and there rocks were seen above the surface, they were but the crests of large boulders, and between them the impetuous wave ran dark and deep. Had the horse lost footing? had he been forced to swim? If so, he must have been carried with the current—his body submerged—his withers sunk below the surface—his helpless rider——

The conclusion was evident to all of us. All felt the convic tion simultaneously. No—not all. There came a word of comfort from the oldest and wisest—a word that gave cheer to my drooping spirit.

"Wagh! the hoss hain't swum a lick *he* hain't."

"Are you sure, Rube? How can you tell?" were the quick interrogatories.

"Sure—how kin I tell—i'deed, how," replied Rube, a little nettled at our having questioned his judgment. "What the devul's yur eyes good for—all o' yur? Lookee, hyur! and I'll show ee how I tell. Do'ee see the color o' thet water?—it ur as brown as a buffler in the Fall; thurfor its fresh kim down; and jest afore the shower, thur want more'n half o' it in the channel. *Then* the hoss mout a waded 'crosst hyur, easy as fallin off a log, and *then* the hoss *did* wade acrosst."

"He crossed before the rain?"

"Shure as a shot from Targuts. Look at the tracks! Them wur made afore a drop o' rain kim down: ef they hedn't, they'd been a durned sight deeper in the sod. Wagh! the hoss got safe acrosst 'ithout wettin a hair o' his hips. So far as drowndin' goes, don't be skeeart 'bout thet, young fellur! the gurl's safe enough yit."

"And the wolves? Do you think they have followed across the stream?"

"Ne'er a wolf o' 'hem—ne'er a one—the vamints hed more

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sense. They knowd thur legs wan't long enough, an thet ur current wud a swep 'em a mile afore they kud a swum half way acrosst. The wolves, they stayed on this side, I reck'n. Look hyur—hyur's thur tracks. Wagh! thur wur a wheen o' the filthy beests. Geehosophat! the bank ur paddled like a sheep-pen."

We bent down to examine the ground. Sure enough, it was covered with the tracks of wolves. A numerous band had crowded together on the spot; and as the prints of their feet pointed in all directions, it was evident they had not gone forward, but brought to a stand by the torrent, had given up the chase and scattered away.

Pray Heaven it was no mere conjecture!

With Rube it was a belief; and as I had grown to put implicit reliance in the old trapper's wood-craft, I felt reassured. Rube's opinions, both as to the steed having safely crossed and the discomfiture of the wolves, were shared by the rest of my followers—not one of whom was a mean authority on such a subject. Garey—second only to his older comrade in the working out of a prairie syllogism—gave Rube's statement his emphatic confirmation. The steed was yet safe—perhaps, too, the rider.

With lighter heart I sprang back into the saddle. My followers imitated the example, and with eyes scanning the stream, we rode along the bank to seek for a crossing.

There was no ford near the spot. Perhaps where the steed had passed over the stream might have been waded at low water; but now, during the freshet, the current would have swept off horse and man like so much cork-wood. The rocks—the black waves that rushed between them—the boiling, frothing eddies—discouraged any attempt at crossing there; we all saw that it was impracticable.

Some rode up stream, others went in the opposite direction.

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Both parties met again with blank looks; neither had found a crossing.

There was no time to search further—at least my impatience would no longer brook delay. It was not the first time for both my horse and myself to cross a river without ford; nor was it the first time for many of my followers.

Below the rapids, the current ran slow, apparently ceasing. The water was still, though wider from bank to bank—a hundred yards or more. By the aid of the moonlight, I could tell that the bank on the opposite side was low and shelving. It could be easily climbed by a horse.

I stayed to reason no further. Many a hundred yards had Moro swum with his rider on his back—many a current had he cleft with his proud breast many times more rapid than that.

I headed him to the bank, gave him the spur, and went plunging into the flood.

Plunge—plunge—plunge! I heard behind my back till the last of my followers had launched themselves on the wave, and were swimming silently over.

One after another we reached the opposite side, and ascended the bank.

Hurriedly I counted our number as the men rode out; one had not yet arrived! Who was missing?

"Rube," answered some one.

I glanced back, but without feeling any uneasiness. I had no fear for the trapper; Garey alleged he was "safe to turn up." Something had detained him. Could his old mare swim?

"Like a mink," replied Garey; "but Rube won't ride her across; he's affeerd to sink her too deep in the water. See! yonder he comes!"

Near the middle of the stream, two faces were observed rippling the wave, one directly in the wake of the other. The

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foremost was the grizzled front of the old mustang, the other the unmistakable physiognomy of her master. The moonlight shining upon both rendered them conspicuous above the dark brown water; and the spectacle drew a laugh from those who had reached the bank.

Rube's mode of crossing was unique, like every action of this singular man. Perhaps he adopted it from sheer eccentricity, or maybe in order that his mustang might swim more freely.

He had ridden gently into the water, and kept his saddle till the mare was beyond her depth—then sliding backward over her hips, he took the tail in his teeth, and partly towed like a fish upon the hook, and partly striking to assist in the passage, he swam after. As soon as the mare again touched bottom, he drew himself up over the croup, and in this way regained his saddle.

Mare and man, as they climbed out on the bank—the thin skeleton bodies of both reduced to their slenderest dimensions by the soaking water—presented a spectacle so ludicrous as to elicit a fresh chorus of laughter from his comrades.

I stayed not till its echoes had died away; but pressing my steed along the bank, soon arrived at the rapids, where I expected to recover the trail. To my joy, hoof-marks were there directly opposite the point where the steed had taken to the stream. He must have *waded* then.

Thank Heaven! at least from that peril has she been saved!

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CHAPTER LXIV.

A LILLIPUTIAN FOREST.

On resuming the trail, I moved with lighter spirit : had three sources of gratulation. The peril of the flood was past —she was not drowned. The wolves were thrown off—the dangerous rapid had deterred them ; on the other side their footprints were no longer found. Thirdly, the steed had slackened his pace. After climbing the bank, he had set off in a rapid gait, but not at a gallop.

"He's been pacin' hyar !" remarked Garey as soon as his eyes rested upon the tracks.

"Pacing ?"

I knew what was meant by this ; I knew that gait peculiar to the prairie-horse, fast but smooth as the amble of a palfrey. His rider would scarcely perceive the gentle movement ; her torture would be less.

Perhaps, too, no longer frighted by the fierce pursuers, the horse would come to a stop. His wearied limbs would admonish him, and then——. Surely he could not have gone much further ?

We, too, were wearied one and all ; but these pleasing conjectures beguiled us from thinking of our toil, and we advanced more cheerfully along the trail.

Alas ! it was my fate to be the victim of alternate hopes and fears. My new-sprung joy was short-lived, and fast fleeted away.

We had gone but a few hundred paces from the river, when we encountered an obstacle, that proved not only a serious barrier to our progress, but almost brought our tracking to a termination.

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This obstacle was a forest of oaks, not *giant* oaks, as these famed trees are usually designated, but the very reverse—a forest of *dwarf* oaks (*Quercus nana*). Far as the eye could reach extended this singular wood, in which no tree rose above thirty inches in height! Yet was it no thicket—no undergrowth of shrubs—but a true forest of oaks, each tree having its separate stem, its boughs, its lobed leaves, and its bunches of brown acorns.

"Shin oak," cried the trappers, as we entered the verge of this miniature forest.

"Wagh!" exclaimed Rube, in a tone of impatience, "hyur's bother. 'Ee may all get out o' yur saddles and rest yur critters: we'll hev to crawl hyur."

And so it resulted. For long weary hours we followed the trail, going not faster than we could have crawled upon our hands and knees. The tracks of the steed were plain enough, and in daylight could have been easily followed: but the little oaks grew close and regular as if planted by the hand of man; and through their thick foliage the moonlight scarcely penetrated. Their boughs almost touched each other, so that the whole surface lay in dark shadow, rendering it almost impossible to make out the hoof-prints. Here and there, a broken branch or a bunch of tossed leaves—their under sides shining-glaucous in the moonlight—enabled us to advance at a quicker rate; but as the horse had passed gently over the ground, these "signs" were few and far between.

For long fretful hours, we toiled through the "shin-oak" forest, our heads far overtopping its tallest trees! We might have fancied that we were threading our way through some extended nursery. The trail led directly across its central part; and ere we had reached its furthest verge, the moon's rays were mingling with the purple light of morning.

Soon after the 'forest opened;' the little dwarfs grew further apart—here scattered thinly over the ground, there disposed in

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clumps or miniature groves—until at length the sward of the prairie predominated.

The trouble of the trackers was at an end. The welcome light of the sun was thrown upon the trail, so that they could lift it as fast as we could ride; and, no longer hindered by brake or bush, we advanced at a rapid rate across the prairie.

Over this ground the steed had also passed rapidly. He had continued to pace for some distance, after emerging from the shin-oak forest; but all at once, as we could tell by his tracks, he had bounded off again, and resumed his headlong gallop.

What had started him afresh? We were at a loss to imagine; even the prairie-men were puzzled.

Had wolves again attacked him, or some other enemy? No; nor one nor other. It was a green prairie over which he had gone, a smooth sward of mezquite grass; but there were spots where the growth was thin—patches nearly bare—and these were softened by the rain. Even the light paw of a wolf would have impressed itself in such places, sufficiently to be detected by the lynx-eyed men of the plains. The horse had passed since the rain had ceased falling. No wolf, or other animal, had been after him.

Perhaps he had taken a start of himself, freshly affrighted at the novel mode in which he was ridden—still under excitement from the rough usage he had received, and from which he had not yet cooled down; perhaps the barbed points of the cohetes rankled in his flesh, acting like spurs; perhaps some distant sound had led him to fancy the hooting mob, or the howling wolves, still coming at his heels; perhaps——

An exclamation from the trackers, who were riding in the advance, put an end to these conjectures. Both had pulled up, and were pointing to the ground. No words were spoken—none needed. We all read with our eyes an explanation of the renewed gallop.

Directly in front of us, the sward was cut and scored by nume

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ous tracks. Not four, but four hundred hoof-prints were indented in the turf—all of them fresh as the trail we were following—and amidst these the tracks of the steed, becoming intermingled, were lost to our view.

"A drove of wild horses," pronounced the guides at a glance they were the tracks of unshod hoofs, though that would scarcely have proved them wild. An Indian troop might have ridden past without leaving any other sign; but these horses had not been mounted, as the trappers confidently alleged; and among them were the hoof-marks of foals and half-grown colts, which proved the drove to be a *caballada* of mustangs.

At the point where we first struck their tracks they had been going in full speed, and the trail of the steed converged until it closed with theirs at an acute angle.

"Ye-es," drawled Rube, "I see how 'tis. They've been skeeart at the awkurd look o' the hoss, an hev put off. See! thur's his tracks on the top o' all o' theirn: he's been running arter 'em. Thur!" continued the tracker, as we advanced—"thur he kez overtuk some o' 'em. See! thur! the varmints hev scattered right and left! Hyur agin, they've galliped thegither, some ahint, and some afore him. Wagh! I guess they know him now, an ain't any more afeerd o' him. See thur! he's in the thick o' the drove."

Involuntarily I raised my eyes, fancying from these words that the horses were in sight; but no; the speaker was riding forward, leaning over in his saddle, with look fixed upon the ground. All that he had spoken he had been reading from the surface of the prairie—from hieroglyphics to me unintelligible, but to him more easily interpreted than the page of a printed book.

I knew that what he was saying was true. The steed had galloped after a drove of wild horses; he had overtaken them; and at the point where we now were, had been passing along in their midst!

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Dark thoughts came crowding into my mind at this discovery—another shadow across my heart. I perceived at once a new situation of peril for my betrothed—new, and strange, and awful.

I saw her in the midst of a troop of neighing wild horses—stallions with fiery eyes and red steaming nostrils; these perhaps angry at the white steed, and jealous of his approach to the *manada*; in mad rage rushing upon him with open mouth and yellow glistening teeth; rearing around and above him, and striking down with deadly desperate hoof—— Oh, it was a horrid apprehension, a fearful fancy!

Yet, fearful as it was, it proved to be the exact shadow of a reality. As the mirage refracts distant objects upon the retina of the eye, so some spiritual mirage must have thrown upon my mind the image of things that were real. Not distant, though then unseen—not distant was the real. Rapidly I ascended another swell of the prairie, and from its crest beheld almost the counterpart of the terrible scene that my imagination had conjured up!

Was it a dream? was it still fancy that was cheating my eyes? No; there was the wild-horse drove; there the rearing, screaming stallions; there the white steed in their midst—he too rearing erect—there upon his back——

"O God, look down in mercy—save her! save her!"

CHAPTER LXV.

SCATTERING THE WILD STALLIONS.

Such rude appeal was wrung from my lips by the dread spectacle on which my eyes rested.

I scarcely waited the echo of my words; I waited not the

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counsel of my comrades, but, plunging deeply the spur, galloped down the hill in the direction of the drove.

There was no method observed, no attempt to keep under cover. There was not time either for caution or concealment. I acted under instantaneous impulse, and with but one thought—to charge forward, scatter the stallions, and, if yet in time, save her from those hurling heels and fierce glittering teeth.

If yet in time—ay, such provisory parenthesis was in my mind at the moment. But I drew hope from observing that the steed kept a ring cleared around him: his assailants only threatened at a distance.

Had he been alone, I might have acted with more caution, and perhaps have thought of some stratagem to capture him. As it was, stratagem was out of the question; the circumstances required speed.

Both trappers and rangers, acting under like impulse with myself, had spurred their horses into a gallop, and followed close at my heels.

The drove was yet distant. The wind blew from them—a brisk breeze. We were half way down the hill, and still the wild horses neither heard, saw, nor scented us.

I shouted at the top of my voice: I wished to startle and put them to flight. My followers shouted in chorus; but our voices reached not the quarrelling caballada.

A better expedient suggested itself: I drew my pistol from its holster, and fired several shots in the air.

The first would have been sufficient. Its report was heard, despite the opposing wind; and the mustangs, affrighted by the sound, suddenly forsook the encounter. Some bounded away at once; others came wheeling around us, snorting fiercely, and tossing their heads in the air; a few galloped almost within range of our rifles, and then uttering their shrill neighing, turned and broke off in rapid flight. The steed and his rider alone remained, where we had first observed them!

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For some moments he kept the ground, as if bewildered by the sudden scattering of his assailants; but he too must have heard the shots, and perhaps alone divined something of what had caused those singular noises. In the loud concussion, he recognized the voice of his greatest enemy; and yet he stirred not from the spot!

Was he going to await our approach? Had he become tamed?—reconciled to captivity? or was it that we had rescued him from his angry rivals—that he was grateful, and no longer feared us?

Such odd ideas rushed rapidly through my mind as I hurried forward. I had begun to deem it probable that he would stay our approach, and suffer us quietly to recapture him. Alas! I was soon undeceived. I was still a long way off—many hundred yards—when I saw him rear upward, wheel round upon his hind feet as on a pivot, and then bound off in determined flight. His shrill scream, pealing back upon the breeze, fell upon my ears like the taunt of some deadly foe. It seemed the utterance of mockery and revenge: mockery at the impotence of my pursuit; revenge that I had once made him my captive.

I obeyed the only impulse I could have at such a moment, and galloped after, as fast as my horse could go. I stayed for no consultation with my companions; I had already forged far ahead of them. They were too distant for speech.

I needed not their wisdom to guide me. No plan required conception or deliberation; the course was clear: by speed only could the horse be taken, and his rider saved from destruction—*if yet safe.*

Oh, the fearfulness of the last reflection! the agony of the doubt!

It was not the hour to indulge in idle anguish; I repressed the emotion, and bent myself earnestly upon the pursuit. I spoke to my brave steed, addressing him by name; I urged him with hands and knees only at intervals did I inflict the cruel steel upon his ribs

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I soon perceived that he was flagging; I perceived it with increased apprehension for the result. He had worn his saddle too long on the day before, and the wet weary night had jaded him. He had been over-wrought, and I felt his weariness, as he galloped with feebler stroke. The prairie-steed must have been fresh in comparison.

But life and death were upon the issue. Her life—perhaps my own. I cared not to survive her. She must be saved. The spur must be plied without remorse: the steed must be overtaken, even if Moro should die!

It was a rolling prairie over which the chase led—a surface that undulated like the billows of the ocean. We galloped transversely to the direction of the "swells," that rose one after the other in rapid succession. Perhaps the rapidity with which we were crossing them brought them *nearer* to each other. To me there appeared no level ground between these land-billows. Up hill and down hill in quick alternation was the manner of our progress—a severe trial upon the girths—a hard killing gallop for my poor horse. But life and death were upon the issue, and the spur must be plied without remorse.

A long cruel gallop—would it never come to an end? would the steed never tire? would he never stop? Surely in time he must become weary? Surely Moro was his equal in strength as in speed?—superior to him in both?

Ah! the prairie horse possessed a double advantage—he had started fresh—he was on his native ground.

I kept my eyes fixed upon him; not for one moment did I withdraw my glance. A mysterious apprehension was upon me I feared to look around, lest he should disappear. The souvenirs of the former chase still haunted me; weird remembrances clung to my spirit. I was once more in the region of the supernatural.

I looked neither to the right nor left, but straight before me—straight at the object of my pursuit, and the distance that lay

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between us This last I continuously scanned, now with fresh hope, and now again with doubt. It seemed to vary with the ground. At one time, I was nearer, as the descending slope gave me the advantage; but the moment after, the steep declivity retarded the speed of my horse, and increased the intervening distance.

It was with joy I crossed the last swell of the rolling prairie, and beheld a level plain stretching before us. It was with joy I perceived that upon the new ground I was rapidly gaining upon the steed!

And rapidly I continued to gain upon him, until scarcely three hundred yards were between us. So near was I, that I could trace the outlines of *her* form—her prostrate limbs—still lashed to the croup—her garments loose and torn—her ankles—her long dark hair, dishevelled and trailing to the ground—even her pallid cheek I could perceive, as at intervals the steed tossed back his head to utter his wild taunting neigh.

I was near enough to be heard. I shouted in my loudest voice; I called her by name. I kept my eyes upon her, and with throbbing anxiety listened for a response. I fancied that her head was raised, as though she understood and would have answered me. I could hear no voice, but her feeble cry might have been drowned by the clatter of the hoofs.

Again I called aloud—again and again pronouncing her name.

Surely I heard a cry; surely her head was raised from the withers of the horse. I could not be mistaken.

"Thank Heaven, she lives!"

I had scarcely uttered the prayer, when I felt my steed yield beneath me as though he was sinking into the bosom of the earth. I was hurled out of the saddle, and flung head foremost upon the plain. My horse had broke through the burrow of the prairie marmot, and the false step had brought him with violence to the ground.

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I was neither stunned nor entangled by the fall; and in a few seconds had regained my feet, my bridle and saddle. But as I headed my horse once more toward the chase, the white steed and his rider had passed out of sight.

CHAPTER LXVI.

LOST IN A CHAPARRAL.

I was chagrined, frantic, and despairing, but not surprised This time there was no mystery about the disappearance of the steed; the chaparral explained it. Though I no longer saw him, he was yet within hearing. His footfall on the firm ground, the occasional snapping of a dead stick, the whisk of the recoiling branches, all reached my ears as I was remounting.

These sounds guided me, and without staying to follow his tracks, I dashed forward to the edge of the chaparral—at the point nearest to where I heard him moving. I did not pause to look for an opening, but heading in the direction from whence came the sounds, I spurred forward into the thicket. Breasting the bushes that reached around his neck, or bounding over them, my brave horse pressed on; but he had not gone three lengths of himself before I recognized the imprudence of the course I was pursuing; I now saw I should have *followed the tracks.*

I no longer heard the movements of the steed—neither footstroke, nor snapping sticks, nor breaking branches. The noise made by my own horse, amid the crackling acacias, drowned every other sound; and so long as I kept in motion, I moved with uncertainty. It was only when I made stop that I could again hear the chase struggling through the thicket; but now the sounds were faint and far distant—growing still fainter as I listened.

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Once more I urged forward my horse, heading him almost at random; but I had not advanced a hundred paces, before the misery of uncertainty again impelled me to halt.

This time I listened and heard nothing—not even the recoil of a bough. The steed had either stopped and was standing silent, or what was more probable, had gained so far in advance of me that his hoofstroke was out of hearing.

Half frantic, angered at myself, too much excited for cool reflection, I lanced the sides of my horse, and galloped madly through the thicket.

I rode several hundred yards before drawing bridle, in a sort of desperate hope I might once more bring myself within earshot of the chaise.

Again I halted to listen. My recklessness proved of no avail. Not a sound reached my ear; even had there been sounds, I should scarcely have heard them above that issuing from the nostrils of my panting horse; but sound there was none. Silent was the chaparral around me—silent as death—not even a bird moved among its branches.

I felt something like self-execration; my imprudence I denounced over and over. But for my rash haste, I might yet have been upon the trail—perhaps within sight of the object of pursuit. Where the steed had gone surely I could have followed. Now he was gone I knew not whither—lost—his trail lost—all lost!

To recover the trace of him, I made several casts across the thicket. I rode first in one direction, then in another, but all to no purpose. I could find neither hoof-track nor broken branch.

I next bethought me of returning to the open prairie, there retaking the trail, and following it thence. This was clearly the wisest, in fact the only course in which there was reason I should easily recover the trail, at the point where the horse had entered the chaparral, and thence I might follow it without difficulty

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I turned my horse round, and headed him in the direction of the prairie—or rather in what I supposed to be the direction—for this too had become conjecture.

It was not till I had ridden for a half-hour, for more than a mile through glade and bush—not till I had ridden nearly twice as far in the opposite direction—and then to right, and then to left—that I pulled up my broken horse, dropped the rein upon his withers, and sat bent in my saddle under the full conviction that I too was lost!

Lost in the chaparral—that parched and hideous jungle, where every plant that carries a thorn seemed to have place. Around grew *acacias*, *mimosas*, *gleditschias*, *robinias*, *algarobias*—all the thorny legumes of the world; above towered the splendid *fouquiera* with spinous stem; there flourished the "tornillo" (*prosopis glandulosa*), with its twisted beans; there the "junco" (*koeblerinia*), whose very leaves are thorns. There I saw spear-pointed yuccas and clawed bromelias (*agave* and *dasylirion*); there, too, the universal cactaceæ (*opuntia*, *mammilaria*, *cereus*, and *echinocactus*); even the very grass was thorny—for it was a species of the "mesquite grass," whose knotted culms are armed with sharp spurs!

Through this horrid thicket I had not passed unscathed; my garments were already torn, my limbs were bleeding!

My limbs—and hers?

Of hers alone was I thinking; those fair proportioned members—those softly rounded arms—that smooth, delicate skin—bosom and shoulders bare—the thorn—the scratch—the tear. Oh! it was agony to think!

By action alone might I hope to still my emotions; and once more rousing myself from the lethargy of painful thought, I urged my steed onward through the bushes.

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CHAPTER LXVII.

ENCOUNTER WITH JAVALI.

I HAD no mark to guide me, either on the earth or in the heavens. I had an indefinite idea that the chase had led westward, and therefore to get back to the prairie, I ought to head towards the east. But how was I to distinguish east from west? In the chaparral both were alike, and so too upon the sky. No sun was visible; the canopy of heaven was of a uniform leaden color; upon its face were no signs by which the cardinal points could have been discovered.

Had I been in a forest of trees, surrounded by a northern *sylva*, I could have made out my course. The oak or the elm, the ash-tree or maple, the beech or sycamore—any of them would have been compass sufficient for me; but in that thicket of thorny shrubs I was completely at fault. It was a subtropical flora, or rather a vegetation of the arid desert, to which I was almost a stranger. I knew there were men skilled in the craft of the chaparral, who, in the midst of it, could tell north from south without compass or star. Not I.

I could think of no better mode than to trust to the guidance of my horse. More than once, when lost in the thick forest or in the boundless plain, had I reposed a similar trust in his instincts—more than once had he borne me out of my bewilderment.

But whither could he take me? Back to the path by which we had come! Probably enough, had that path led to a home; but it did not; my poor steed, like myself, had no home. He, too, was a ranger; for years had been flitting from place

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to place, hundreds, aye, thousands of miles from each other. Long had he forgotten his native stall.

I surmised that if there was water near, his instinct might carry him to that—and much needed it both horse and rider Should we reach a running stream, it would serve as a guide

I dropped the rein upon his neck, and left him to his will.

I had already shouted in my loudest voice, in hopes of being heard by my comrades; by none other than them, for what could human being do in such a spot, shunned even by the brute creation? The horned lizard *(agama cornuta)*, the ground rattlesnake, the shell-covered armadillo, and the ever-present coyoté, alone inhabit these dry jungles; and now and then the javali *(dicotyles torquatus)*, feeding upon the twisted legumes of the "tornillo," passes through their midst; but even these are rare; and the traveller may ride for scores of miles through the Mexican chaparral without encountering aught that lives and moves. There reigns the stillness of death. Unless the wind be rustling among the pinnate fronds of the acacias, or the unseen locust utters its harsh shrieking amid the parched herbage, the weary wayfarer may ride on, cheered by no other sound than his own voice, or the footfall of his horse.

There was still the chance that my followers might hear me I knew that they would not stray from the trail. Though they must have been far behind when I entered the chaparral, following the tracks they would in time be sure to come up.

It was a question whether they would follow mine, or that of the steed. This had not occurred to me before, and I paused to consider it. If the former, then was I wrong in moving onward, as I should only be going *from* them, and leading them in a longer search. Already had I given them a knot to unravel, my devious path forming a labyrinthine maze.

It was more than probable they would follow *me*—in the belief that I had some reason for deviating from the trail of the steed, perhaps for the purpose of heading or intercepting him.

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This conjecture decided me against advancing further—at least until some time should elapse, enough to allow them to come up with me.

Out of compassion for my hard-breathing horse, I dismounted. At intervals, I shouted aloud, and fired shots from my pistols: after each I listened; but neither shot nor shout reached me in reply. They must be distant indeed, not to hear the report of firearms; for had they heard them, they would have been certain to make answer in a similar manner. All of them carried rifles and pistols.

I began to think it was time they should have reached me. Again I fired several shots; but, as before, echo was the only reply. Perhaps they had *not* followed me? perhaps they had kept on upon the trail of the steed, and it might lead them far away, beyond hearing of the reports? perhaps there was not yet time for them to have arrived?

While thus conjecturing, my ears were assailed by the screeching of birds at some distance off. I recognized the harsh notes of the jay, mingling with the chatter of the red cardinal.

From the tones, I knew that these birds were excited by the presence of some animal. Perhaps they were defending their nests against the black snake or the *crotalus*.

It might be my followers approaching? it might be the steed—like me, still wandering in the chaparral?

I sprang to my saddle to get a better view, and gazed over the tops of the trees. Guided by the voices of the birds, I soon discovered the scene of the commotion. At some distance off, I saw both jays and cardinals fluttering among the branches, evidently excited by something on the ground beneath them. At the same time I heard strange noises, far louder than the voices of the birds, but could not tell what was causing them. My spirits sank, for I knew they could not be produced either by my comrades or the steed.

It was not far, and I determined to satisfy myself as to what

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was causing such a commotion in this hitherto silent place. I rode towards the spot, as fast as my horse could make way through the bushes. I was soon satisfied.

Coming out on the edge of a little glade, I became spectator to a strange scene—a battle between the red cougar and a band of *javali*.

The fierce little boars were "ringing" the panther, who was fighting desperately in their midst. Several of them lay upon the ground, struck senseless or dead, by the strong paws of the huge cat; but the others, nothing daunted, had completely surrounded their enemy, and were bounding upon him with open mouths, wounding him with their sharp shining tusks.

The scene aroused my hunter instincts, and suddenly unslinging my rifle, I set my eye to the sights. I had no hesitation about the selection of my mark—the panther, by all means—and drawing trigger, I sent my bullet through the creature's skull, at once stretching him out in the midst of his assailants.

Three seconds had not elapsed, before I had reason to regret the choice I had made of a victim. I should have let the cougar alone, and either held my fire, or directed it upon one of his urchin-like enemies; for the moment he was *hors de combat*, his assailants became mine—transferring their "surround" to my horse and myself, with all the savage fierceness they had just exhibited towards the panther!

I had no means of punishing the ungrateful brutes. They had not given me time to reload my rifle before commencing the attack, and my pistols were both empty. My horse, startled by the unexpected assault, as well as by the strange creatures that were making it, snorted and plunged wildly over the ground; but go where he would, a score of the ferocious brutes followed, springing against his sides, and scoring his shanks with their terrible tusks. Well for me I was able to keep the saddle; had I been thrown from it at that moment, I should certainly have been torn to pieces.

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I saw no hope of safety but in flight, and spurring my horse I gave him full rein. Alas! through that tangled thicket the javali could go as fast as he; and after galloping a hundred yards or so, I perceived the whole flock still around me, leaping as fiercely as ever around the limbs of my steed.

The result might have proved awkward enough; but at that moment I heard voices, and saw mounted men breaking through the underwood. They were Stanfield, Quackenboss, and the rest of the rangers.

In another second they were on the ground; and their revolvers, playing rapidly, soon thinned the ranks of the javali, and caused the survivors to retreat grunting and screaming into the thicket.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE WOODS ON FIRE.

The trappers were not among those who had rescued me—where were they? The others made answer, though I already guessed what they had to tell. Rube and Garey had followed the tracks of the steed, leaving the rangers to come after me.

I was pleased with the ready intelligence of my comrades; they had acted exactly as they should have done. I was myself found, and I no longer entertained any apprehension that the trail would be lost.

By this time, the trappers must be far upon it; more than an hour had elapsed since they and the others had parted company. My zigzag path had cost my followers many a bewildering pause.

But they had not ridden recklessly as I, and could find their way back. As it was impossible to tell in what direction Rube and Garey had gone, this course was the best to be followed.

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and under the guidance of Stanfield, an expert woodsman, we commenced returning to the prairie. It was not necessary to follow back our own crooked trail. The Kentuckian had noted the "lay" of the chaparral, and led us out of its labyrinths by an almost direct path.

On reaching the open prairie, we made no halt; but upon the tracks of Rube, Garey, and the steed, once more entered the chaparral.

We had no difficulty about our course; it was plainly traced out for us; the trappers had "blazed" it. In most places, the tracks of the three horses were sufficient indices of the route; but there were stretches where the ground was stony, and upon the parched arid herbage, even the shod hoof left no visible mark. In such places, a branch of acacia broken and pendulous, the bent flower-stem of an aloe or the succulent leaves of the cactus slashed with a sharp knife, were conspicuous and unmistakable signs; and by the guidance of these we made rapid advance.

We must have gone much faster than the trackers themselves —for notwithstanding the freshness of the trail, there were dry spots and patches of cut rock over which it passed, and where it must have cost both time and keen perception to trace it.

As we were travelling so much more rapidly than Rube and Garey could have done, I looked forward to our soon overtaking them; with eager anticipation, I looked forward. Surely they would have some news for me, now that they had been so long in the advance Surely by this time they must have come in sight of the steed?—perhaps captured him? Oh, joyous anticipation!

Or would they return with a different tale? Was I to meet the report that he still hurried on—on for ever? That he had swam some rapid stream? or plunged over a precipice—into some dark abyss?

Though hastening on after the trackers, there were moments

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when I feared to overtake them—moments when I dreaded to hear their tale!

We had worked our way about five miles through the hideous jungle, when I began to feel a strange sensation in my eyes—a sensation of pain—what is usually termed a "smarting." I at first attributed it to the want of sleep. My companions complained that they were affected in a similar manner.

It was not until we had gone some distance farther, that we found the true explanation, by perceiving that there was *smoke upon the air!* Smoke it was that was causing the bitterness in our eyes.

The denizen of the prairie never regards such an indication with indifference. Where there is smoke, there is fire, and where fire, danger—at least, upon the broad grassy steppes of the west. A burning forest may be shunned. You may stand near to the forest on fire, and contemplate such a scene with safety; but a blazing prairie is a phenomenon of a different character; and it is, indeed, a rare position where you may view, without peril, this sublime spectacle.

There are prairies that will not burn. The plains covered with the short "buffalo grass" (*sesleria dactyloides*), and the sward of various species of "gramma" (*chondrosium*), rarely take fire, or if they do, horse, man, buffalo, or antelope, can easily escape by leaping across the blaze. 'Tis only the reptile world—snakes, lizards, the toad and the land turtle (*terrapin*)—that fall victims to such a flame.

Not so upon the "weed prairie," or those where the tall reed-grass rises above the withers of a horse—its culms matted and laced together by the trailing stems of various species of bind-weed, by creeping convolvulus, cucurbitaceæ, and wild pea-vines. In the dry season, when a fire lays its hold upon vegetation of this character, there is danger indeed—where it rages, there is death.

It was smoke that affected our eyes, causing them to smart

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and water. Fire must be causing the smoke—what was on fire? I could detect apprehension in the looks of my followers, as we rode on. It was but slight, for as yet the smoke was scarcely perceptible, and the fire, wherever it was, must be distant—so fancied we.

As we advanced, the glances of the men became more uneasy. Beyond a doubt, the smoke was thickening around us—the sky was fast becoming darker, and the pain in our eyes more acute.

"The woods are on fire," said Stanfield

Stanfield was a backwoodsman, his thoughts ran upon "woods.'

Whether forest or prairie, a conflagration was certainly raging. It might be far off, for the wind will carry the smoke of a prairie fire a long distance; but I had an unpleasant suspicion that it was *not* distant. I noticed dropping around us the white floe of burnt leaves, and from the intense bitterness of the smoke, I reasoned that it could not have floated far—its gases were not yet dissipated

It was not the distance of the fire that so much troubled me, as its direction. The wind blew right in our teeth, and the smoke was travelling with the wind. The conflagration must be ahead—directly upon the trail!

The smoke grew thicker and thicker—ahead, the sky appeared slashed with a lurid light; I fancied I could hear the crackling of the flames. The air felt hot and dry: a choking sensation came into our throats, and one and all were soon hacking and gasping for breath.

So dark had it suddenly become, or rather so blinded were we with the smoke, we could scarcely make out the trail.

My followers would have stopped, but I urged them on. With voice and example I urged them on—myself leading the way. My heart was too sore to make pause.

Where in all this were Rube and Garey? We had come far and fast; we should now be nearly up with them—they could not be much ahead.

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I hallooed as we advanced.

"Hullow!" came the response, in the rough baritone of the younger trapper.

We hurried forward in the direction of the voice. The path conducted to an opening in the chaparral, in the centre of which through the smoke, we could distinguish the forms of men and horses.

With eager eyes, I scanned the group; a glance was sufficient: there were *only two* of each—only the trackers.

CHAPTER LXIX.

SMOKE AND THIRST.

"Ah, Monsieur Roob!" cried the Canadian, as we hurried up, "vat make ce de la diable d'une fumée—smoke? Are ze woods on fire—you tink—eh?"

"Wuds!" exclaimed Rube, with a contemptuous glance at the speaker. "Wagh! Thur's no wuds hyur. Thur's a paraira afire. Don't ee smell the stink o' the grass?"

"Pe gar, oui! vraiment—c'est la prairie? You sure, Monsieur Roob?"

"Sure!" vociferated the trapper, in a tone of indignation—"Sure!—ye durned parley-voo-eat-a-frog, spit-a-brick, soup-suckin' Frenchman, d' yur think I don't know the smell o' a burnin' paraira? Wagh!"

"Ah, Monsieur Roob, me pardon. Vat I mean ask—is ze chaparral brulé—on fire—ces arbres?"

"The chaparral ain't afire," answered Rube, somewhat mollified by the apology; "so don't be skeeart, Frenchy; yur safe enuf."

This assurance seemed to gratify not only the timid Canadian.

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but others, who, up to this moment, were apprehensive that it was the thicket that was on fire.

For myself, I had no such fears; I perceived that the chaparral could not burn. Here and there, patches of dry mezquite trees would have caught like tinder; but in most places, a succulent endogenous vegetation formed three parts of the jungle, and rendered it "fire-proof." This was especially the case around the glade where the trappers had taken their stand, and which was completely inclosed by a wall of the great organ cactus, with aloes, opuntias, and other juicy-leaved plants. In the opening, we were as safe from the fire as though it was a hundred miles off; we suffered only from the smoke, that now quite filled the atmosphere, causing a darkness that rivalled night.

I had no apprehension for *our* safety; it was not of that I was thinking.

To the hasty dialogue between Rube and the Canadian I had scarcely given heed; Garey had advanced to meet me, and I listened with anxious ear to the tale of the tracker.

It was soon told. Rube and he had followed the trail, until it emerged from the chaparral, and struck out into a wide grass-prairie. The edge of the thicket was close by; but they had gone a considerable distance beyond it and across the plain. They were still advancing, when, to their consternation, they perceived that the prairie was on fire directly ahead of them! The wind was rolling both smoke and flames before it with the rapidity of a running horse, and it was with difficulty they escaped from it by galloping back to the chaparral.

And the steed—what had become of him? Had they seen nothing?

I did not put these questions in words—only in thought did I ask them; and in thought only were they answered. Both the trackers were silent, and that was an answer in the negative; yes, I read an ominous negative in their looks of gloom.

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We were compelled to halt; even the smoke rendered further progress impossible; but we could hear the fire at no great distance—the culms of the coarse reed-grass cracking like volleys of musketry.

Now and then, a scared deer broke through the bushes, passing us at full speed. A band of antelopes dashed into the glade, and halted close beside us—the frightened creatures not knowing where to run. At their heels came a pack of prairie-wolves, but not in pursuit of them: these also stopped near. A black bear and a cougar arrived next; and fierce beasts of prey and gentle ruminants stood side by side, both terrified out of their natural habits. Birds shrieked among the branches, eagles screamed in the air, and black vultures could be seen hovering through the smoke, with no thought of stooping upon a quarry!

The hunter man alone preserved his instincts. My followers were hungry. Rifles were levelled—and the bear and one of the antelopes fell victims to the deadly aim.

Both were soon stripped of their skins, and butchered. A fire was kindled in the glade, and upon sword-blades and sapling spits the choice morsels of venison and "bear-meat" were roasted, and eaten, with many a jest about the "smoky kitchen."

I was myself hungered. I shared the repast, but not the merriment. At that moment, no wit could have won from me a smile; the most luxurious table could not have furnished me with cheer.

A worse appetite than hunger assailed my companions, and I felt it with the rest—it was thirst; for hours all had been suffering from it; the long hard ride had brought it on, and now the smoke and the dry hot atmosphere increased the appetite till it had grown agonizing, almost unendurable. No water had been passed since the stream we had crossed before day; there was none in the chaparral; the trackers saw none so far as they had gone: we were in a waterless desert; and the very

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thought itself renders the pang-thirst keener and harder to endure.

Some chewed their leaden bullets, or pebbles of chalcedony which they had picked up; others had gained relief by drinking the blood of the slaughtered animals—the bear and the antelope—but we found a better source of assuagement in the succulent stems of the cactus and agave.

The relief was but temporary: the juice cooled our lips and tongues, but there is an acrid principle in these plants that soon acted, and our thirst became more intense than ever.

Some talked of returning on the trail in search of water—of going back even to the stream—more than twenty miles distant.

Under such circumstances, even military command loses its authority. Nature is stronger than martial law.

I cared not if they did return; I cared not who left me, so long as the trappers remained true. I had no fear that they would forsake me, and my disapprobation of it checked the cheerless proposal, and once more all declared their willingness to go on.

Fortunately, at that crisis the smoke began to clear away, and the atmosphere to lighten up. The fire had burnt on to the edge of the chaparral, where it was now opposed by the sap-bearing trees. The grass had been all consumed—the conflagration was at an end.

Mounting our horses, we rode out from the glade; and following the trail a few hundred yards farther, we emerged from the thicket, and stood upon the edge of the desolated plain

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CHAPTER LXX.

A BURNT PRAIRIE.

The earth offers no aspect more drear and desolate than that of a burnt prairie. The ocean when its waves are grey—a blighted heath—a flat, fenny country in a rapid thaw,—all these impress the beholder with a feeling of chill monotony; but the water has motion, the heath color, and the half-thawed flat exhibits variety in its mottling of white and ground.

Not so the steppe that has been fired and burned. In this the eye perceives neither color, nor form, nor motion. It roams over the limitless level in search of one or other, but in vain; and in the absence of all three, it tires, and the heart grows cheerless and sick. Even the sky scarcely offers relief. It, too, by refraction from the black surface beneath, wears a dull, livid aspect; or perhaps the eye, jaundiced by the reflection of the earth, beholds not the brightness of the heavens.

A prairie, when green, does not always glad the eye—not even when enamelled with fairest flowers. I have crossed such plains, verdant or blooming to the utmost verge of vision, and longed for *something* to appear *in sight*—a rock, a tree, a living creature—anything to relieve the universal sameness; just as the voyager on the ample ocean longs for ships, for *cetaceæ*, or the sight of land, and is delighted with a nautilus, polypi, phosphorescence, or a floating weed.

Color alone does not satisfy the sense. What hue more charming than the fresh verdure of the grassy plain? what more exquisite than the deep blue of the ocean? and yet the eye grows weary of both! Even the "flower-prairie," with its thousands of gay corollas of every tint and shade—with its

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golden helianthus, its white argemone, its purple cleome, its pink malvaceæ, its blue lupin, its poppyworts of red and orange —even these fair tints grow tiresome to the sight, and the eye yearns for form and motion.

If so, what must be the prairie when divested of all its verdant and flowery charms—when burned to black ashes? It is difficult to conceive the aspect of dreary monotony it then presents—more difficult to describe it. Words will not paint such a scene.

And such presented itself to our eyes as we rode out from the chaparral. The fire was past—even the smoke had ceased to rise, except in spots where the damp earth still reeked under the heat; but right and left, and far ahead, on to the very hem of the horizon, the surface was of one uniform hue, as if covered with a vast crape. There was naught of form to be seen, living or lifeless; there was no life or motion even in the elements; all sounds had ceased: an awful stillness reigned above and around—the world seemed dead and shrouded in its sable pall!

Under other circumstances, I might have stayed to regard such a scene, though not to admire it. On that interminable waste, there was naught to be admired, not even sublimity; but no spectacle however sublime, however beautiful, could have won from me a thought at that moment.

The trackers had already ridden far out, and were advancing, half concealed by the cloud of black "stoor" flung up from the heels of their horses. For some distance they moved straight on without looking for the tracks of the steed. Before meeting the fire, they had gone beyond the edge of the chaparral; after a while, I observed them moving more slowly, with their eyes upon the ground as if looking for the trail. I had doubts of their being able either to find or follow it now. The shallow hoof-prints would be filled with the debris of the burnt herbage —surely they could no longer be traced?

By myself, they could not, nor by a common man; but it

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seemed that to the eyes of those keen hunters, the trail was as conspicuous as ever. I saw that after searching a few seconds they had taken it up, and were once more moving along, guided by the tracks. Some slight hollows I could perceive, distributed here and there over the ground, and scarcely distinguishable from the surrounding level. Certainly, without having been told what they were, I should not have known them to be the tracks of a horse.

It proved a wide prairie, and we seemed to be crossing its central part. The fire had spread far.

At one place, nearly midway, where the trail was faint, and difficult to make out, we stopped for a short while to give the trackers time. A momentary curiosity induced me to gaze around. Awful was the scene—awful without sublimity. Even the thorny chaparral no longer relieved the eye; the outline of its low shrubbery had sunk below the horizon, and on all sides stretched the charred plain up to the rim of the leaden canopy, black—black—illimitable. Had I been alone, I might easily have yielded to the fancy, that the world was dead.

Gazing over this vast opacity, I for a moment forgot my companions, and fell into a sort of lethargic stupor. I fancied that I, too, was dead or dreaming—I fancied that I was in hell—the Avernus of the ancients. In my youth, I had the misfortune to be well schooled in classic lore, to the neglect of studies that are useful; and often in life have the poetical absurdities of Greek and Latin mythology intruded themselves upon my spirit—both asleep and awake. I fancied, therefore, that some well-meaning Anchises had introduced me to the regions below and that the black plain before me was some landscape in the kingdom of Pluto. Reflection—had I been capable of that—would have convinced me of my error. No part of that monarch's dominions can be so thinly peopled.

I was summoned to reason again by the voices of my followers. The lost trail had been found, and they were moving on.

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CHAPTER LXXI.

THE TALK OF THE TRACKERS.

I SPURRED after, and soon overtook them. Regardless of the dust, I rode close in the rear of the trackers, and listened to what they were saying.

These "men of the mountains"—as they prided to call themselves—were peculiar. While engaged in a duty, such as the present, they would scarce disclose their thoughts, even to me; much less were they communicative with the rest of my following, whom they were accustomed to regard as "greenhorns"—their favorite appellation for all men who have not made the tour of the grand prairies. Notwithstanding that Stanfield and Black were backwoodsmen and hunters by profession, Quackenboss a splendid shot, Le Blanc a regular "*voyageur*," and the others more or less skilled in woodcraft, all were greenhorns in the opinion of the trappers. To be otherwise, a man must have starved upon a "sage-prairie"—"run" buffalo by the Yellowstone or Platte—fought "Injun," and shot Indian—have well-nigh lost scalp or ears—spent a winter in Pierre's Hole upon Green River—or camped amid the snows of the Rocky Mountains! Some one of all these feats must needs have been performed ere the "green horn" can matriculate and take rank as a "mountain man."

I of all my party was the only one who, in the eyes of Rube and Garey, was *not* a greenhorn, and even I—gentleman amateur that I was—was hardly up either in their confidence or their "craft." It is indeed true—with all classic accomplishments, with my fine words, my fine horse, and my fine clothes—so long as we were within the limits of prairie-land, I acknowledged these men as my superiors. They were my guides, my instructors, my masters.

Since overtaking them on the trail, I had not asked them to

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give any opinion. I dreaded a direct answer—for I had noticed something like a despairing look in the eyes of both.

As I followed them over the black plain, however, I thought that their faces brightened a little, and appeared once more lit up by a faint ray of hope. For that reason, I rode close upon their heels, and eagerly caught up every word that was passing between them. Rube was speaking when I first drew near.

"Wagh! I don't b'lieve it, Bill; 'taint possyble no-how-so-ever. The paraira wur sot afire—must 'a been; thur's no other ways for it. It couldn't 'a tuk to bleezin o' itself—eh?"

"Sartinly not; I agree wi' you, Rube."

"Wal—thur wur a fellur as I met oncest at Bent's Fort on the Arkinsaw—a odd sort o' critter he wur, an' no mistake; he us't to go pokin' about, gatherin' weeds an' all sorts o' green garbitch, an' spreadin' 'em out atween sheets o' paper—whet he called buttoneyesin—jest like thet ur Dutch doctur as wur rubbed out, when we went into the Navagh country, t'other side o the Grand."

"I remembers him."

"Wal, this hyur fellur I tell 'ee about, he us't to talk mighty big o' this, thet, and t' other; an' he palavered a heap 'bout a thing thet, ef I don't disremember, wur called *spuntaynyus kumbuxshun.*"

"I've heerd o' 't; that are the name."

"Wal, the button-eyeser, he sayed thet a paraira mout take afire o' itself, 'ithout anybody whatsomdiver hevin sot it. Now, thet ur's what this child don't b'lieve, nohow. In coorse, I knows thet lightuin' sometimes may sot a paraira a bleezin', but lightuin' s a natral fire o' itself; and it's only reezunible to expect thet the dry grass wud catch from it like punk; but I shed like to know how fire kud kindle by itself—thet's whet I shed like to know."

"I don't believe it can," rejoined Garey.

"Ne'er a bit o' it I never seed a burn'n' paraira yit, thet

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thur wa'n't eyther a camp-fire or a Injun at the bottom o' it—thet ur 'ceptin whur lightnin' hed did the bizness."

"And you think, Rube, thar's been Injun at the bottom o' this?"

"Putty nigh sure; and I'll gie you my reezuns. Fust, do 'ee see thur's been no lightnin' this mornin' to 'a made the fire? Seconds, it's too fur west hyur for any settlement o' whites—in coorse I speak o' Texans—thur might be Mexikins; them I don't call white, nohow nosomediver. And then, agin, it kin scarce be Mexikins neyther. It ur too fur no'th for any o' the yellur bellies to be a strayin' jest now, seein as it's the *Mexikin moon* wi' the Kimanchees, an' both them an' the Leepans ur on the war-trail. Wal, then, it's clur thur's no Mexikin 'bout hyur to hev sot the paraira afire, an thur's been no lightnin to do it; thurfor, it must 'a been did eyther by a Injun, or thet ur dod-rotted spuntaynyus kumbuxshun."

"One or t'other."

"Wal, bein' as this child don't b'lieve in the kumbuxshun nohow, thurfor it's my opeenyun thet red Injuns did the bizness—*they* did sartint."

"No doubt of it," assented Garey.

"An ef they did," continued the old trapper, "thur about yit somewhur not fur off, an' we've got to keep a sharp lock-out for our har—*we* hev."

"Safe, we have," assented Garey.

"I tell 'ee, Bill," continued Rube, in a new strain, "the Injuns is mighty riled jest now. I never knowd 'em so savagerous an' fighty. The war hez gin 'em a fresh start, an' thur dander's p agin us, by reezun thet the gin'ral didn't take thur offer to help us agin the yellur-bellies. Ef we meet wi' eyther Kimanch or Leepan on these hyur plains, thu'll scalp us, or we'll scalp 'em—thet'll be it. Wagh!"

"But what for could they 'a sot the parairy on fire?" inquired Garey.

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"Thet ere," replied Rube, "thet ere wur what puzzled me at fust. I thort it mout 'a been done by accydent—preehaps by the scatterin' o' a camp-fire—for Injuns is careless enuf 'bout thet. Now, hows'owever, I've got a diff'rent idee. Thet story thet Dutch and Frenchy hev fetched from the rancherie, gies me a insight inter the hull bizness."

I knew the "story" to which Rube had reference. Lige and Le Blanc, when at the village, had heard some rumor of an Indian foray that had just been made against one of the Mexican towns, not far from the rancheria. It had occurred on the same day that we marched out. The Indians—supposed to be Lipans or Comanches—had sacked the place, and carried off both plunder and captives. A party of them had passed near the rancheria after we ourselves had left it. This party had "called" at the Hacienda de Vargas and completed the pillage, left unfinished by the guerrilla. This was the substance of what the messengers had heard.

"You mean about the Injuns?" said Garey, half interrogatively.

"In coorse," rejoined Rube. "Belike enuf, 'em Injuns ur the same niggurs we gin such a rib-roastin' to by the moun. Wagh! they hain't gone back to thur mountains, as 'twur b'lieved; they dassent 'a gone back in sich disgrace, 'ithout takin eyther har or hosses. The squaws ud 'a hooted 'em."

"Sure enough."

"Sure sartint. Wal, Billee, 'ee see now what I mean: thet party's been a skulketin 'bout hyur ever since, till they got a fust-rate chance at the Mexikin town, an' thur they've *struck a blow*."

"It's mighty like as you say, Rube; but why have they set fire to the parairy?"

"Wagh! Bill, kin ye not see why: it ur plain as Pike's Peak on a summery day."

"I don't see," responded Garey, in a thoughtful tone.

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"Well, this child *do;* an' this ur the reezun: as I tell 'ee, the Injuns hain't forgot the lambaystin they hed by the moun; an preehaps bein' now a weak party, an' thinkin thet we as wolloped 'em wur still i' the rancherie, they wur afeerd thet on hearin o' thur pilledgin', we mout be arter 'em."

"An' they've burnt the parairy to kiver thur trail?"

"Preezactly so."

"By gosh, you're right, Rube?—it's uncommon like. But whar do you think this trail's goin'? Surely, the hoss hain't been caught in the fire?"

I bent forward in the saddle, and listened with acute eagerness. To my great relief, the answer of the old trapper was in the negative.

"He hain't," said he; "ne'er a bit o' it. His trail, do 'ee see, runs in a bee-line, or clost on a bee-line; now, ef the fire hed 'a begun afore he wur across this paraira, he wud long since 'a doubled 'bout, an tuk the back track; but 'ee see he hain't did so; thurfor, I conclude he's safe through it, an' the grass must 'a been sot afire ahint 'im."

I breathed freely after listening to these words. A load seemed lifted from my breast, for up to this moment I had been vainly endeavoring to combat the fearful apprehension that had shaped itself in my imagination. From the moment that we had entered the burned prairie, my eyes constantly, and almost mechanically, had sought the ground in front of our course, had wandered over it, with uneasy glance, in dread of beholding forms—lifeless—burned and charred——

The words of the trapper gave relief—almost an assurance that the steed and his rider were still safe—and, under inspiration of renewed hope, I rode more cheerfully forward.

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CHAPTER LXXII.

"INJUN SIGN."

After a pause, the guides resumed their conversation, and I continued to listen. I had a reason for not mingling in it. If I joined them in their counsels, they might not express their convictions so freely, and I was desirous of knowing what they truly thought. By keeping close behind them, I could hear all—myself unnoticed under the cloud of dust that rose around us. On the soft ashes, the hoof-stroke was scarcely audible, our horses gliding along in a sweeping, silent walk.

"By Gosh! then," said Garey, "if Injuns fired the parairy, they must 'a done it to wind'ard, an' we're travellin' right in the teeth o' the wind; we're goin' in a ugly direction, Rube; what do you think o't, old hoss?"

"Jest what you sez, boyee—a cussed ugly direckshun—durnation'd ugly."

"It aint many hours since the fire begun, and the redskins won't be far from t' other side, I reckon. If the hoss-trail leads us right on them, we'll be in a fix, old boy."

"Aye," replied Rube, in a low but significant drawl; "ef it do, an' ef this niggur don't a miskalkerlate, it *will* lead right on em, *plum straight custrut into thur camp.*

I started on hearing this. I could no longer remain silent; but brushing rapidly forward to the side of the trapper, in hasty phrase demanded his meaning.

"Jest what 'ee've heern me say, young fellur," was his reply.

"You think that there are Indians ahead—that the horse was gone to their camp!"

"No, not *gone* thur; nor kin I say for sartint thur ur Injuns

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yet; though it looks mighty like. Ther's nuthin' else to guv reezun for the fire—nuthin' as Bill or me can think o'; an' ef thur be Injuns, then I don't think the hoss hez *g ne* to thur camp, but I do kalkerlate it's mighty like he's been *tuk* thur; thet's whet I thinks, young fellur."

"You mean that the Indians have captured him?"

"That's preezactly what this child means."

"But how? What reason have you for thinking so!"

"Wal—jest because I think so."

"Pray explain, Rube!" I said, in an appealing tone. feared that his secretive instincts would get the better of him, and he would delay giving his reasons, from a pure love of mystification that was inherent in the old fellow's nature. I was too anxious to be patient; but my appeal proved successful.

"Wal, 'ee see, young fellur, the hoss must 'a crosst hyur jest afore this prairia wur sot afire; and it's mighty reezunible to s'pose thet whosomediver did the bizness, Injun or no Injun, must 'a been to win'ard o' hyur. It ur also likely enuf, I reckun, thet the party must 'a seed the hoss; and it ur likely agin thet nobody wa'nt a gwine to see *thet* hoss, wi' the gurl stropped down 'long his hump ribs, 'ithout being kewrious enuf to take arter i'm. Injuns 'ud be safe to go arter 'im, yellin' like blazes; and arter 'im they've gone, and roped 'im, I reckun—that they've done."

"You think they could have caught him?"

"Sartin. The hoss by then must 'a been dead beat—thet ur, unless he's got the divvel in 'em; an by Geehorum! I gin to surspect——. Gehu—Gehosophat! jest as I said; lookee, thur—thur!"

"What is it?" I inquired, seeing the speaker suddenly halt, and point to the ground, upon which his eyes also were fixed. "What is it, Rube? I can perceive nothing strange."

"Don't 'ee see 'em hoss-tracks!—thur!—thick as sheep feet—hundreds o' 'em!"

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I certainly noticed some slight hollows in the surface, nearly levelled up by the black ashes. I should not have known them to be horse-tracks.

"They ur," said Rube, "every one o' 'em—an' Injun hoss tracks, sure."

"They may be the wild hosses, Rube!" said one of the rangers, riding up, and surveying the sign.

"Wild jackasses!" angrily retorted the old trapper. "Whur did *you* ever see a wild hoss? Do 'ee s'pose I've turned stone blind, do 'ee? Stan thur, my mar!" he cried, flinging his lean carcass out of the saddle, at the same time talking to his mare: "'ee knows better than thet fellur, I kin tell by the way yur miftin'. Keep yur ground a minute, ole gurl, till ole Rube shew these hyur greenhorns how a mountain man kin read sign—wild hosses! wagh!"

After thus delivering himself, the trapper dropped upon his knees, placed his lips close to the ground, and commenced blowing at the black ashes. All had by this time ridden up, and sat in their saddles watching him.

We saw that he was clearing the ashes out of one of the hollows which he had pronounced to be horse-tracks, and which now proved to be so.

"Thur, now, mister!" said he turning triumphantly, and rather savagely, upon the ranger who had questioned the truth of his conjecture; "thur's a *shod* track—shod wi' parflesh, too. Did 'ee ever see a wild hoss, or a wild mule, or a wild jackass eyther, shod wi' parflesh? Ef 'ee did, it's more 'n Rube Rawlins ever seed, and that ur trapper's been on the hoss-plains well nigh forty yeern. Wagh!"

Of course, there was no reply to this interrogatory. There was the track, and, dismounting, we all examined it in turn.

Sure enough it was the track of a shod horse—shod with *parflèche*—thick leather, made from the hide of the baffalo bull.

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We all knew this to be a mode of shoeing practiced by the horse-Indians of the plains, and only by them.

The evidence was conclusive: Indians had been upon the ground

CHAPTER LXXIII.

TRANSLATING THE "SIGN."

This discovery brought us to a halt. A consultation ensued, in which all took part; but as usual the others listened to the opinions of the prairie-men, and especially to that of Rube.

The old trapper was inclined to sulk for some time, and acted as if he meant to withhold his advice. Nothing "huffed" him more than to have his word contradicted, or his skill called in question. I have known him to be "out of sorts" for days, from having his woodcraft doubted by some one whom he deemed less skilled than himself; and indeed there were few of his kind whose knowledge of the wilderness was at all comparable with his He was not always in the right, but generally where his instincts failed, it was idle to try further. In the present case, the man who had thoughtlessly doubted him was one of the "greenest" of the party, but this verdancy only aggravated the matter in the eyes of old Rube.

"Sich a fellur as you," he said, giving a last dig to the offending ranger—"sich a fellur as you oughter git yur head shet up; u.et ur tongue o' yourn keeps a gwine like a bull's tail in fly-time. Wagh!"

As the man made no reply to this rather rough remonstrance, Rube's "dander" soon smothed down, and once more getting cool, he turned his attention to the business of the hour.

That there had been Indians upon the ground was now as

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ascertained fact; the peculiar shoeing of the horses rendered it indubitable. Mexican horses, if shod at all, would have had a shoeing of iron—at least on their fore feet. Wild mustangs would have had the hoof naked; while the tracks of Texan or American horses could have been easily told, either from the peculiar shoeing or the superior size of their hoofs. The horses hat had galloped over that ground were neither wild, Texan, nor Mexican: Indian they must have been.

Although the one track first examined might have settled the point, it was a fact of too much importance to be left under the slightest doubt. The presence of Indians meant the presence of enemies—foes dire and deadly; and it was with something more than feelings of mere curiosity that my companions scrutinized the sign.

The ashes were blown out from several others, and these carefully studied. Additional facts were brought to light by those Champollions of the prairie—Rube and Garey. Whoever rode the horses, had been going in a gallop. They had not ridden long in one course; but here and there had turned and struck off in new directions. There had been a score or so of them. No two had been galloping together; their tracks converged or crossed one another—now zigzagging, now running in right lines, or sweeping in curves and circles over the plain.

All this knowledge the trackers had obtained in less than ten minutes, simply by riding round the place. Not to disturb them in their diagnosis, the rest of us halted upon the spot where the new tracks had been first observed, and there awaited the result of their scrutiny.

In ten minutes' time both came back to us; they had read he sign to their satisfaction, and needed no further light.

That sign had disclosed to them one fact of more significance than all the rest. Of course, we all knew that the Indian horsemen had gone over the ground before the grass had been burnt; but how long before? We had no difficulty in making

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out that it was upon that same day, and since the rising of the sun—these were trifles easily ascertained; but at *what hour* had they passed? Late, or early? With the steed, before, or after him?

About this point I was most anxious, but I had not the slightest idea that it could be decided by the "sign." To my astonishment, those cunning hunters returned to tell me, not only the very hour at which the steed had passed the spot, but also that the Indian horsemen had been riding *after him!* Clairvoyance could scarcely have gone farther.

The old trapper had grown expletive, more than was his wont. It was no longer a matter of tracking the white steed. Indians were near. Caution had become necessary, and neither the company nor counsel of the humblest was to be scorned. We might soon stand in need of the strength even of the weakest in our party.

Freely, then, the trackers communicated their discoveries, in answer to my interrogations.

"The white hoss," said Rube, "must 'a been hyur 'bout four hours ago, kalkerlatin' the rate at which he wur a gwine, and kalkerlatin' how fur he hed ter kum. He haint 'a stopped nowhur; an' 'ceptin i' the thicket, he hez gallipt the rest o' the way—thet's clur. Wal, we knows the distance, thurfor we knows the time—thet's clur too; an' four hour's 'bout the mark, I reck'n—preehaps a leetle less, an alser preehaps a leetle more. Now, furrermore to the peint. Them niggurs hez been eyther clost arter 'im, in view o' the critter, or follerin' 'im on the trail—the one or the t'other—an' which 'taint possyble to tell wi' this hyur sign, no-how-cum-somever. But thet they *wur arter* 'im, me an Bill's made out clur as mud—thet we sartintly hez."

"How have you ascertained that they were after?"

"The tracks, young fellur—the tracks."

"But how by them?"

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"Easy as eatin' hump-rib: them as wur made by the white hoss ur *un'ermost.*"

The conclusion was clear indeed. The Indians must have been *after* him.

We stayed no longer upon the spot, but once more sending the trackers forward, moved on after them.

We had advanced about half a mile farther, when the horse-tracks, hitherto scattered, and tending in different directions, became merged together, as though the Indians had been riding, not in single file—as is their ordinary method—but in an irregular body of several abreast.

The trackers, after proceeding along this new trail for a hundred yards or so, deliberately drew up, and dismounting, bent down upon their hands and knees, as if once more to examine the signs. The rest of us halted a little behind, and watched their proceedings without offering to question them.

Both were observed to be busy blowing aside the ashes, not from any particular track, but from the full breadth of the trail.

In a few minutes they succeeded in removing the black dust from a stretch of several yards—so that the numerous hoof-prints could be distinctly traced, side by side, or overlapping and half obliterating one another.

Rube now returned to where they had commenced, and then once more leisurely advancing upon his knees, with eyes close to the surface, appeared to scrutinize the print of every hoof separately.

Before he had reached the spot where Garey was still engaged in clearing off the dust, he rose to his feet with an air that told he was satisfied, and turning to his companion, cried out:

"Don't bother furrer, Bill: it ur jest as I thort; they've ·ped 'im. Geehosophat!"

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CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE STEED LAZOED.

It was not the emphatic tone in which this announcement was made that produced within me conviction of its truth; I should have been convinced without that. I was better than half prepared for the intelligence thus rudely conveyed; for I was myself not altogether unskilled in that art of which my trapper-companions were masters.

I had observed the sudden convergence of the horse-tracks; I had noticed, also, that after coming together, the animals had proceeded at a slow pace—at a walk. I needed only to perceive the hoof of the steed among the others, to know that he no longer ran free—that he was a captive.

This the tracker had found; hence the decisive declaration that the Indians had "roped" him—in other words, had caught him with their lazoes.

"Sartint they've tuk 'im," asserted Rube, in answer to an interrogatory: "sartint sure; hyur's his track clur as daylight. He's been led hyur at the end o' a laryette; he's been nigh the middle o' the crowd—some in front—some hev been arter 'im—thet's how they've gone past hyur. Wagh!" continued the speaker, once more turning his eyes upon the trail, "thur's been a good grist on 'em—twunty or more; and ef this child don't miskalkerlate, thet ain't the hull o' the niggurs; *it* ain't. 'Tur only some o' 'em as galliped out to rope the hoss. I'd lay my rifle agin a Mexican blunderbox, thur's a bigger party than this nigh at hand somewhur hyur. By Geehosophat, thur's boun to be, sartint as sunup!"

The suspicion that had half formed itself in my mind was no

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longer hypothetical; the sign upon the trail had settled that, it was now a positive intelligence—a conviction. The steed hac been taken; he and his rider were captive in the hands of the Indians.

This knowledge brought with it a crowd of new thoughts, in which emotions of the most opposite character were mingled together.

The first was a sensation of joy. The steed had been captured, and by human beings. Indians at least were men, and possessed human hearts. Though in the rider they might recognize the lineaments of their pale-faced foes—not so strongly neither—yet a woman, and in such a dilemma; what reason could they have for hostility to her? None; perhaps the very opposite passion might be excited by the spectacle of her helpless situation. They would see before them the victim of some cruel revenge—the act, too, of their own enemies; this would be more likely to inspire them with sympathy and pity; they would relieve her from her perilous position; would minister to her wants and wounds; would tenderly nurse and cherish her: yes; all this I felt assured. They were human; how could they do otherwise?

Such was the first rush of my reflections on becoming assured that the steed had been captured by Indians—that Isolina was in their hands. I only thought of her safety—that she was rescued from pain and peril, perhaps from death; and the thought was a gleam of joy.

Alas! only a gleam; and the reflections that followed were painfully bitter.

I could not help thinking of the character of the savages into whose hands she had fallen. If they were the same band that had harried the frontier town, then they were southern Indians—Comanche or Lipan. The report said one or other; and it was but too probable. True, the remnant of Shawanos and Delawares, with the Kickapoos and Texan Cherokees, sometimes

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stray as far as the banks of the Rio Grande; but the conduct was not theirs: these tribes, from long intercourse with whites, have been inducted into a sort of semi-civilization; and their hereditary hostility for the pale-face has died out. Pillage and murder are no longer their trade; it could not have been they who had made the late foray. It might have been "Wild Cat," with his wicked Seminoles, now settled on the Texan frontier; but the act was more in keeping with the character of the mezcal-eating Apachés, who of late years had been pushing their expeditions far down the river. Even so—it mattered little; Apachés are but Comanches, or rather Comanches, Apachés, and whether the Indians on whose trail we were standing were one or the other—whether Apaché, Lipan, Comanche, or their allies Caygüa, Waco, or Pawnee-Pict, it mattered not; one and all were alike; one or other of them, my reflections were bitterly the same. Well understood I the character of these red men of the south; so far differing from their kindred of the north—so far different from that ideal type of cold continence it has pleased the poet and the writer of romance to ascribe to them. The reverse of the medal was before my mind's eye; the memory of many a scene was in my thoughts, of many a tale I had heard, illustrating the uxorious disposition, the wild, unbridled wantonness of these lords of the southern plains.

Not then did I dwell long on such thoughts; for they had their influence in urging me onward.

But there was another reason for our rapid advance: all of us were under the extreme agony of thirst—literally gasping for water; and thus physical suffering impelled us to ride forward as fast as our jaded horses could carry us over the ground.

Timber was at length before our eyes, green foliage, looking all the fresher and brighter from contrast with the black plain which it bounded. It was a grove of cotton-woods, skirting a prairie-stream; and beyond this the fire had not extended.

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Wild joyous cries escaped from men and horses, as their eyes rested upon the limpid stream. The men leaped out of their saddles, and without a thought of drowning, rushed breast-deep into the water. Some lifted the crystal liquid in their palms; others, more impatient, bent down, and plunging their faces in the flood, drank *à la mode du cheval.*

I noticed that the trappers behaved less recklessly than the rest; before going down to drink, the eyes of both were directed, with instinctive, caution, along the banks, and into the timber.

Close to where we had halted, I observed a crossing, where numerous tracks of animals formed in the soil a deep, well-beaten path. Rube's eyes were upon it, and I saw that they were glistening with unusual excitement.

"Told 'ee so!" cried he, after a short survey: "yonder's thur trail—*war-trail,* by the Eturnal!"

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE "INDIOS BRAVOS."

You may be asking, what the trapper meant by a war-trail? it has been a phrase of frequent occurrence with us. It is a phrase of the frontier. Even at the eleventh hour, let me offer its explanation.

For half a century—ay, for three centuries and more—even since the conquest itself—the northern frontier of Mexico has been in, what is termed in old-fashioned phraseology, a "disturbed state." Though the semi-civilized Aztecs, and the kindred races of town-dwelling Indians, easily yielded to the sword of the Spanish conquerors, far different has been the history of the wild tribes—the free hunters of the plains. Upon those mighty steppes that occupy the whole central area of the North

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American continent, dwell tribes of Indians—nations they might be called—who neither know, nor ever have known, other rule than that of their own chieftains. Even when Spain was at her strongest, she failed to subjugate the "Indios bravos" of her frontiers, who to the present hour have preserved their wild freedom. I speak not of the great nations of the northern prairies—Sioux and Cheyenne—Blackfeet and Crow—Pawnee and Arapahoe. With these the Spanish race scarcely came in contact. I refer more particularly to the tribes whose range impinges upon the frontiers of Mexico—Comanche, Lipan, Utah, Apaché, and Navajo.

It is not in the annals of Spain to prove that any one of these tribes ever yielded to her conquering sword; and equally a failure has been the attempt to wheedle them into a fanatical civilization by the much boasted conquest of the mission. Free, then, the prairie Indians are from white man's rule, and free have they been, as if the keels of Columbus had never plowed the Carib Sea.

But although they have preserved their independence for three centuries, for three centuries have they never known peace. Between the red Indian and the white Iberian, along the frontier of Northern Mexico, a war-border has existed since the days of Cortez to the present hour—constantly shifting north or south, but ever extended from east to west, from ocean to ocean, through wide degrees of longitude. North of this border ranges the "Indio bravo;" south of it dwells his degenerate and conquered kinsman, the "Indio manso," not in the "tents," but in the towns of his Spanish conqueror; the former free as the prairie wind—the latter yoked to a condition of "peon" vassalage, with chains as strong as those of slavery itself. The neutral belt of hostile ground lies between—on the one side guarded by a line of garrisoned forts (*presidios*), on the other sheltered from attack by the wild and waterless desert.

I have stated that this war-border has been constantly shif-

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ing either northward or southward. Such was its history up to the beginning of the present cycle. Since then, a remarkable change has been going forward in the relative position of Indian and Iberian; and the line of hostile ground has been moving only in one direction—continually *towards the South!* To speak in less poetical phrase, the red man has been encroaching upon the territory of the white man—the so-called savage has been gaining ground upon the domain of civilization. Not slowly or gradually, either, but by gigantic strides—by the conquest of whole provinces as large as England ten times told!

I shall make the announcement of a fact, or rather a hypothesis—scarcely well known, though strange enough. It may interest, if not surprise, the ethnologists. I assert, then, that had the four tribes of North Mexican Indians—Comanche, Lipano, Apaché, and Navajo—been left to themselves, *in less than another century they would have driven the degenerate descendants of the conquerors of Cortez from the soil of Anahuac!* I make this assertion with a full belief and clear conviction of its truthfulness. The hypothesis rests upon a basis of realities. It would require but very simple logic to prove it; but a few facts may yield illustration.

With the fall of Spanish rule in Mexico, ended the predominance of the Spaniard over the Indian. By revolution the presidios became shorn of their strength, and no longer offered a barrier even to the weakest incursion. In fact, a neutral line no more exists; whole provinces—Sonora, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, Cinaloa, and Leon—are no better than neutral ground, or, to speak more definitely, form an extended territory conquered and desolated by the Indians. Even beyond these, into the "provincias internas," have the bold copper-colored freebooters of late carried their forays—even to the very gates of Durango. Two hundred Comanche warriors, or as many Apachés, fear not to ride hundreds of miles into the heart of civilized Mexico—hesitate not to attack a city or a settlement

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—scruple not to drag from hearth and home lovely maids and tender children—*only* these—and carry them slave and captive to their wild fastnesses in the desert! And this is no occasional foray, no long gathering outburst of revenge or retaliation; but an *annual* expedition, forming part of the regular routine of the year, and occurring at the season when the buffalo have migrated to the north—occurring in that month in the calendar of these aboriginal brigands, jocosely styled the "Mexican moon!"

Upon whose head falls the blow thus periodically repeated? Upon the poor and unprotected? No doubt you will fancy so

A single fact may serve to undeceive you. Only a few years ago, Trias, a man of "first family" in Mexico, and governor of the State of Chihuahua, lost one of his sons by an Indian foray. The boy was taken prisoner by the Comanches; and it was only after years of negotiation and payment of a large sum, that the father recovered his child. Thus the governor of a province, with means and military at his command, was not powerful enough to cause the surrender of his captive son: he was forced to *buy* him!

It is computed, that at this moment, there are three thousand white captives in the hands of the North Mexican Indians—nearly all of them of Spanish descent. They are mostly females, and live as the slave-wives of their captors—if such connection may be dignified by the name. There are white men, too, among the Indian prisoners, taken in their youth; and strange as it may appear, few of them—either of the men or women—evince any desire to return to their former life or homes. Some, when ransomed, have refused the boon. Not uncommon along the frontier has been witnessed that heart-rending scene—a father who had recovered his child from the savages, and yet unable to reclaim its affection, or even to arouse it to a recognition of its parentage. In a few years—sometimes only months—the captives forget their early ties, and become wedded to their new life—become *Indianized.*

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But a short time before, an instance had come under our own observation. The wounded brave taken in the skirmish at the mound, was a full-blooded Mexican—had been carried off by the Comanches, some years before, from the settlements on the Lower Rio Grande. In consideration of this, we gave him his liberty, under the impression that he would gladly avail himself f the opportunity to return to his kindred.

He proved wanting in gratitude as in natural affection. The same night on which he was set free, he took the route back to the prairies, mounted upon one of the best horses of our troop, which he had stolen from its unfortunate owner!

Such are the "Cosas de Mexico"—a few of the traits of frontier life on the Rio Bravo del Norté.

But what of the war-trail? That is not yet explained.

Know then, that from the country of the Indians to that of the Mexicans extend many great paths, running for hundreds of miles from point to point. They follow the courses of streams or cross vast desert plains, where water is found only at long intervals of distance. They are marked by the tracks of mules horses and captives. Here and there they are whitened by bones—the bones of men, of women, of animals, that have perished by the way. Strange paths are these! What are they, and who has made them? Who travel by these roads that lead through the wild and homeless desert?

Indians: they are the paths of the Comanche and Caygua—the roads made by their warriors during the "Mexican moon."

It was upon one of these that the trapper was gazing when he gave out the emphatic utterance:

"War-trail, by the Eternal!"

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CHAPTER LXXVI.

ON THE WAR-TRAIL.

SCARCELY staying to quench my thirst, I led my horse across the stream, and commenced scrutinizing the trail upon the opposite bank. The faithful trackers were by my side—no fear of them lagging behind.

I had won the hearts of both these men; and that they would have risked life to serve me, I could no longer doubt, since over and over again they *had* risked it. For Garey, strong, courageous, handsome in the true sense, and noble hearted, I felt real friendship, which the young trapper reciprocated. For his older comrade, the feeling I had was like himself—indefinable, indescribable. It was strongly tinctured with admiration, but admiration of the intellectual rather than the moral or personal qualities of the man.

Instead of intellectual, I should rather say instinctive, for his keen intuitive thoughts appeared more like instincts than the results of a process of ratiocination.

That the old trapper admired me—in his own phraseology, "liked me mightily"—I was aware. He was equally as zealous as the younger in my service; but too free an exhibition of zeal was in his eyes a weakness, and he endeavoured to conceal it. His admiration of myself was perhaps owing to the fact that I neither attempted to thwart him in his humors nor rival him in his peculiar knowledge—the craft of the prairie. In this I was but his pupil, and behaved as such, generally deferring to his judgment.

Another impulse acted upon the trackers—sheer love of the part they were now playing. Just as the hound loves the

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trail, so did they; and hunger, thirst, weariness, one or all must be felt to an extreme degree before they would voluntarily forsake it.

Scarcely staying, therefore, to quench their thirst, they followed me out of the water; and all three of us together bent our attention to the sign.

It was a *war-trail*—a true war-trail. There was not the track of a dog—not the drag of a lodge-pole upon it. Had it been a moving encampment of peaceable Indians, these signs would have been visible; moreover, there would have been seen numerous footsteps of Indian women—of squaws; for the slave-wife of the lordly Comanche is compelled to traverse the prairies *à pied*, loaded like the pack-horse that follows at her heels!

But though no foot-prints of Indian women appeared, there *were* tracks of women, scores of them, plainly imprinted in the soil of the river-bank. Those slender impressions, scarcely a span in length, smoothly moulded in the mud, were not to be mistaken for the footsteps of an Indian squaw. There was not the wide divergence at the heels—the toes turned inward; neither was there the moccasin-print. No; those tiny tracks must have been made by women of that nation who possess the smallest and prettiest feet in the world—by women of Mexico.

"Captives!" we exclaimed, as soon as our eyes rested upon the tracks.

"Ay, poor critters!" said Rube, sympathizingly; "the cussed niggurs hev made 'em fut it, while thur's been spare hosses a plenty. Wagh! a good wheen o' weemen thur's been—a score on 'em at the least. Wagh! I pity 'em poor gurls! in sech kumpny as they've got into. It ur a life they've got to lead Wagh!"

Rube did not reflect how heavily his words were falling upon my heart.

There were the tracks of more than a hundred horses, and as

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many mules. Some of both were iron-shod; but for all that we knew they had been either ridden or driven by Indians; they, too, were captives

The sign helped my companions to much knowledge that would have been unintelligible to me. It was certainly the path of a war-party of Indians *on the back track.* They were laden with plunder, and driving before them, or forcing to follow, a crowd of captives—horses, mules, and women—children, too, for we saw the tiny foot-marks of tender age. The trail was significant of all this—even to me.

But my comrades saw more; they no longer doubted that the Indians were Comanches—a moccasin had been picked up, a castaway, and the leathern tassel attached to the heel, declared the tribe to which its wearer belonged to be the Comanche.

The trail was quite fresh; that is, but a few hours had intervened since the Indians passed along it. Notwithstanding the dryness of the atmosphere, the mud on the river-edge had not yet become "skinned," as the trappers expressed it. The Indians had forded the stream about the time the prairie was set on fire

The horses we had been following across the burnt plain were those of a party who had gone out in pursuit of the steed. Just at the ford they had overtaken the main body, who carried along the spoil and captives. From that point, all had advanced together.

Had they done so? This was our first object of inquiry. It was almost too probable to admit of a doubt; but we desired to be certain about a matter of such primary importance, and we looked for the hoof with the piece chipped from its edge—easily to be identified by all of us. In the muddy margin of the stream we could not find it; but the steed may have been led or ridden in front of the rest, and his tracks trampled out by the thick drove that followed.

At this moment Stanfield came up and joined us in the exami

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nation. The ranger had scarcely bent his eyes on the trail when a significant exclamation escaped him. He stood pointing downward to the track of a shod horse.

"My horse!" cried he; "my horse Hickory, by Gosh!"

"Your horse?"

"May I never see Kaintuck if it aint."

"Yur sure o' it, ole hoss? yur sure it's yurn?"

"Sure as shootin'; I shod him myself. I kid tell that ere mark on a dry sand-bar. I know every nail thar; I druv 'em wi' my own hand—it's him sartin."

"Wheeo-o!" whistled Rube, in his significant way, "thet makes things a leetle plainer, I reck'n; an' so I thort all along—an' so I thort—ye-es—so I thort. The durned rennygade niggur!" he added, with angry emphasis, "I know'd we dud wrong to let 'im go; we oughter served 'im as I perposed; we oughter cut his durnation throat, an' scalped 'im the minnut we tuk 'im: cuss the luck thet we didn't! Wagh!"

Rube's words needed no interpretation. We knew whose throat he would have cut—that of the Indianized Mexican taken at the mesa; and I remembered that at the time of his capture such had been Rube's advice—overruled, of course, by the more merciful of his comrades. The trapper had assigned some reason: he knew something of the man's history.

He now repeated his reasons:

"He ur a true rennygade," said he; "an' thur aint on all the parairas a wusser enemy to whites than thet ur—more partiklurly to Texan whites. He wur at the massacree o' Wilson's family on the clur fork o' the Brazos, an' wur conspik'us in the skrimmage; a' more too—it ur thort he toated off one o' Wilson's gurls, an' made a squaw o' her, for he's mighty given thet way, I've heern. Wagh! he ur wuss than a Injun, for the reczun thet he unerstans the ways o' the whites. I never know'd sich a foolish thing as ter let 'im git clur. 'Ee may thank yur luck, Mister Stannafeel, thet he didn't take yur har at the same

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time when he wur a-takin' o' yur hoss. Wagh! thet ye may-!"

It was Stanfield's horse that had been stolen by the renegade, and the tracks now identified by the ranger were those of that animal—no doubt with the freebooter upon his back.

This new discovery let in a flood of light. Beyond a doubt the war-party was the same we had met by the mound, with perhaps a reinforcement; the same that had just plundered the Mexican town; the same who had paid their horrid visit to the hacienda, and this renegade——

Ha! Strange remembrances were crowding into my brain. I remembered meeting this semi-savage skulking about the road, after we had granted him his parole; I remembered, upon one occasion, seeing him while riding out with *her;* I remembered the rude expression with which he had regarded my companion—the glance half fierce half lustful; I remembered that it made me angry; that I rebuked and threatened him—I now remembered all.

Wild thoughts came rushing into my mind—worse thoughts than ever.

I sprang to my saddle, and calling out some half-coherent orders, rode rapidly along the trail.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE WRITING ON THE MAGUEY.

The skill of the trackers was no longer called in need. The war-trail was as easily followed as a toll-road. A blind man could have guided himself along such a well-trodden highway.

Our rate of speed was now ruled by the capacity of our horses

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Alas! their power was nearly at an end. They had been two days and a night under the saddle, with but a few hours to refresh themselves by food or rest—they could not hold on much longer.

One by one, they began to lag, until the greater number of them followed with tottering step hundreds of yards in the rear. It was in vain to contend against nature. The men were still willing, though they, too, were wearied to death; but their horses were quite done up—even whip and spur could force them no farther. Only my own matchless steed could have continued the journey. Alone, I might have advanced, but that would have been madness. What could I have accomplished alone?

Night was fast coming down—it was already twilight. I saw by the clouded sky we should have no moon. We might follow the trail with our waxen torches—not yet burned out—but that would no longer be safe. For myself, I was reckless enough to have risked life in any way, but the lives of my comrades were not mine. I could not give them—I should not wastefully fling them away.

Reluctantly, I glided from my saddle, gave my horse to the grass, and sat down upon the earth. My followers, coming up, said not a word, but, picketing their horses, seated themselves around me. One by one, they stretched themselves along the sward, and in ten minutes all were asleep.

I alone could not sleep—the fever of unrest was upon me—the demon of thought would not let me close my eyes. Though my orbs ached with the long protracted vigil, I thought that not "all the drowsy syrups of the world" could have given repose to my nerves. I felt as one who suffers under delirium produced by the intoxicating cup—the fearful *munia-a-potia*. I could neither sleep nor rest.

I could not even remain seated. I rose to my feet and wandered around, without heed of where I was going. I strode

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over the recumbent forms of my sleeping companions; I went among the horses; I paced backwards and forwards along the bank of the stream.

There *was* a stream—a small arroyo or rivulet. It was this that had caused me to halt in that particular spot; for, wild as were my thoughts, I had enough of reason left to know that we could not encamp without water. The sight of the arroyo had decided my wavering resolution; and upon its bank, almost mechanically, I had drawn bridle and dismounted.

I once more descended to the bed of the stream; and raising the water in the palms of my hands, repeatedly applied it to my lips and temples. The cool liquid refreshed me, and seemed to soothe both my nerves and my spirit. After a time both felt calmer, and I sat down upon the bank, and watched for a while the clear rivulet rippling past over its bed of yellow sand and glistening pebbles of quartz. The water was perfectly diaphanous; and though the sun was no longer shining, I could see tiny silver-fish, of the genus *hyodon*, sporting themselves in the depths of the pool. How I envied them their innocent gambols—their life of crystal purity and freedom! Here in this remote prairie stream dwelt not the alligator, nor the ravenous garfish—here came no dolphin or shark to chase them—no tyrant of the deep to put them in fear. Envious, indeed, such an *insouciant* happy existence.

I watched them for a long while, till I thought that my eyes were growing heavy, and after all I might sleep. The murmur of the arroyo helped to increase this propensity for repose, and perhaps I might have slept; but, at this moment, chancing to look around, my eyes fell upon an object that again drove sleep far away, and I was soon as wakeful as ever.

Close to my elbow where I had seated myself, grew a large plant of the Mexican aloe (*agave Americana*). It was the wild maguey, but of a species with broad, fleshy leaves, of a dark green color—somewhat resembling the maguey of cultivation

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I noticed that one of the great blades of the plant was bruised down, and the spine which had terminated it, torn off.

All this would not have drawn my attention. I was already aware that the Indians had made a halt where we were encamped, and their sign was plenteous around, tracks of their animals, and the broken branches of trees. One of their horses or mules might have munched at the maguey in passing; and viewing the bruised blade from a distance, I should have hazarded such a conjecture. But my eyes were close to the plant, and to my astonishment, I observed that there was *writing upon the leaf!*

I turned over upon my knees, and seizing the huge blade, bent it down before me, so as to obtain a better view of its surface. I read:

"*Captured by Comanches—a war party—have many captives—women and children—ay de mi! pobres Niñas!—north-west from this place—saved from death, alas! I fear*"——

The writing ended abruptly. There was no signature; but it needed not that. I had no doubts about who was the writer, rude as was the chirography, from the materials used. I easily identified the hand. It was Isolina de Vargas who had written.

I saw that she had torn off the terminal spine, and, using it as a stylus, had graven those characters upon the epidermis of the plant.

Sweet, noble spirit! under any guise I could have recognized its outpouring.

"Saved from death!"—thank Heaven for that! "Alas, I fear"—Oh, what feared she? Was it worse than death?—that terrible fate, too terrible to think of?

She had broken off without finishing the sentence. Why had she done so?—the sheet was broad—would have held many more words. Why had she not written more? Did she dread to tell the cause of her fear? or had she been interrupted by the approach of some of her tyrant captors? O merciful Heaven! save me from thought!

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I re read the words over and over. I examined the other leaves of the plant; on both sides, concave and convex, I examined them; there was nothing more. Not a word more could I find. What I had read was all she had written

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE SOUTHERN SAVAGE.

I NEED not tell how deeply I was affected by the unexpected communication. All at once were decided a variety of doubts. All at once was I made aware of the exact situation.

Isolina still lived—that was no longer doubtful; and the knowledge produced joy. More than this; she was still uninjured—able to think, to act, to write—not only living, but well. The singular "billet" was proof.

Another point: her hands must have been free—her hands, at least—else how could she have traced those lines? It argued indulgence, or tender treatment, on the part of her captors.

Another point yet. *She knew I was in pursuit.* She *had* seen me then, as I galloped after. It was her cry I had heard as the horse dashed into the chapparal. She had recognized me, and called back.

She knew I would still be following. She knew I was following; and for me was the writing meant. Sweet, subtle spirit!

Once more I devoured the welcome words; but my heart grew heavy as I pondered over them. What had caused her to break off so abruptly? What was it her intention to have said? Of what was she in fear? It was my conjectures about this that caused the heaviness upon my heart. I gave way to horrid imaginings.

Naturally my thoughts reverted to her captors; naturally I

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reflected upon the character of the prairie savage, so different from that of the forest Indian—opposite as is the aspect of their homes, and perhaps influenced by this very cause, though there are many others. Climate; contact with Spanish civilization, so distinct from Saxon; the horse; conquest over white foes; concubinage with white and beautiful women, the daughters of the race of Andalusia—all these have combined to produce in the southern Indian a spiritual existence that more resembles Andalusia than England—more like to Mexico than Boston or New York.

There is not so much difference between Paris and the prairies—between the *habitué* of the Bal Mabille, and the horse-Indian of the plains. No cold ascetic this—no romantic savage, alike celebrated for silence and continence, but a true voluptuary, gay of thought and free of tongue, amorous, salacious, immoral. In nine cases out of ten, the young Comanche is a boastful Lothario as any *flaneur* that may be met upon the Boulevards; the old, a lustful sinner; women the idol of both.

Among Comanches, woman is the constant theme of conversation—their motive for every act. For them, they throw the prairie dice—for them, they race their swift mustangs. To win them, they paint in hideous guise; to buy them, they steal horses; to capture them, they go to war!

And yet, with all their wanton love, they are true tyrants to the sex. Wife they have none; for it would be sheer sacrilege to apply this noble title to the "squaw" of a Comanche. Mistress is scarce a fitter term—rather say *slave*. Hers is a hard lot, indeed. Hers it is to hew the wood and draw the water; to strike the tent and pitch it; to lead the horse, and pack the dog; to grain the skin, and cure the meat; to plant the maize, the melon, squash—to hoe and reap them; to wait obsequious on her lounging lord, anticipate his whim or wish; be true to him, or lose her ears or nose—for such horrid forfeiture is by Comanche custom the punishment for conjugal infidelity!

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But hard as is the lot of the native wife, harder still is that of the white captive. 'Tis hers to endure all the ills enumerated, with still another—the hostility of the "squaw" herself The white captive is truly the slave of a slave—the victim of a treble antipathy—of race, of color, of jealousy. Ofttimes is she beaten, abused, mutilated; and rarely does her apathetic lord interfere to protect her from this feminine but fiend-like persecution.

These were not imaginings—they were not fancies begot in my own brain—would they had been so! Too well did I know they were facts—horrid realities.

Can you wonder that sleep was shaken from my eye-lids? that I could not think of rest or stay, till I had delivered my loved one—my betrothed—from the dangers of such a destiny?

All thought of sleep was banished—even weariness forsook me. I felt fresh as if I had slept; my nerves were strung for emprise. It was excitement renewed by what I had read—the impatience of a new and keen apprehension.

I would have mounted and gone forward, spurning both rest and sleep—regardless of danger would I have followed—but what could I do alone?

Aye, and what with my few followers? Ha! I had not thought of this—up to that moment I had not put this important question, and I had need to reflect upon the answer. What if we should overtake the band of brigands? Booty-laden as they were, and cumbered with captives, surely we should come up with them, by night or by day; but what then? Aye, what then? There were nine of us, and we were in pursuit of a war party of at least one hundred in number! one hundred braves armed and equipped for battle—the choice warriors of their tribe—flushed with late success, and vengeful against ourselves on account of former defeat. If conquered, we need look for no mercy at their hands; *if* conquered—how could it be otherwise? Nine against a hundred! How could *we* conquer?

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Up to this moment I had not thought of the result—I was borne along by only one impulse—the idea of overtaking the steed, and rescuing his rider. It was only within the hour that her peril had assumed a new phase—only an hour since we had learnt that she had escaped from one danger to be brought within the influence of another.

At first had I felt joy, but the feeling was of short existence I recognized in the new situation a greater peril than that she had outlived: she had been rescued from death to become the victim of dishonor.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

A SUBTERRANEAN FIRE.

In the midst of my meditations, night descended upon the earth. It promised to be a moonless night. A robe of sable clouds formed a sombre lining to the sky, and through this neither moon nor star were visible.

It grew darker apace, until in the dim light I could scarce distinguish the forms of my companions—neither men nor horses—though both were near me.

The men were still asleep, stretched along the grass in various attitudes, like so many bodies upon a battle-field. The horses were too hungry to sleep—the constant "crop-crop" told that they were greedily browsing upon the sward of granna grass that, by good fortune, grew luxuriantly around. This would be the best rest for them, and I was glad to think that this splendid provender would, in a few hours, recruit their strength. It was the *chondrosium pæneum*—the favorite food of horses and cattle, and in its effects upon their condition almost equal to the bean or the oat. I knew it would soon freshen the jaded ani

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mals, and make them ready for the road. At least in this there was some consolation.

Notwithstanding the pre-occupation of my thoughts, I began to experience a physical discomfort, which, despite the low latitude, is often felt upon the southern prairie—cold. A chill breeze had set in with the night, which in half an hour became a strong and violent wind, increasing in coldness as in strength In that half hour the thermometer must have fallen at least fifty Fahrenheit degrees—and such a phenomenon is not rare upon the plains of Texas. The wind was the well-known "norther," which often kills both men and animals, that chance to be exposed to its icy breath.

I have endured the rigor of a Canadian winter—have crossed the frozen lakes—have slept upon a snow wreath amidst the wild wastes of Rupert's Land, but I cannot remember cold more intensely chilling than that I have suffered in a Texan norther. This extreme does not arise from the actual depression of the thermometer—which at best is but a poor indicator of either heat or cold—I mean the sensation of either. It is more probably the contrast arising from the sudden change—the exposure—the absence of proper clothing or shelter—the state of the blood with other like circumstances, that cause an extreme temperature to be more sensibly felt. I had ofttimes experienced the chill blast of the norther, but never more acutely than upon that night. The day had been sweltering hot—the thermometer at noon ranging about the one hundreth degree, while in the first hour of darkness it could not have been far above the twentieth. Had I judged by my sensations, I should have put it even lower—certainly it had passed the freezing point, and sharp sleet and hail were borne upon the wings of the wind. With nerves deranged from want of rest and sleep—after the hot day's march—after the perspiration produced by long exposure upon the heated surface of the burnt prairie—I perhaps felt the cold more acutely than I should

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otherwise have done. My blood seemed to stagnate and freeze within my veins.

I was fain to wrap around my body a buffalo robe which some careless savage had dropped upon the trail. My followers were not so well furnished. Starting as we had done without any hought of being absent for the night, no preparation had been made for camping out. Only a few of them chanced to have their blankets strapped upon the cantles of their saddles. These were now the fortunate ones.

The norther had roused all of them from their slumbers—had awaked them as suddenly as douches of cold water would have have done ; and one and all were groping about in the darkness —some seeking for their blankets—some for such shelter as was afforded by the lee side of the bushes.

Fortunately, there were saddle blankets, and these were soon dragged from the backs of the horses. The poor brutes themselves suffered equally with their owners. They stood cowering under the cold, with their hips to the cutting blast, their limbs drawn close together, and their flanks shaggy and shining. Some sheltered themselves behind the bushes, scarce caring to touch the grass at their feet

It would have been easy enough to make a fire—there was dry wood in plenty near the spot, and of the best kind for burning—the large species of mezquite. Some of the men were for kindling fires at once, regardless of consequences, but this design was overruled by the more prudent of the party. The trappers were strongly against it. Cold as was the night and dark, they knew that neither the norther nor the darkness would deter Indians from being abroad. A party might be out upon the prowl—the very buffalo skin we had picked up might bring a squad of them back—for it was the grand robe of some warrior, whose whole life-history was delineated in hieroglyphical painting upon its inner surface To have made a fire might have cost us our lives.

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So alleged the trappers Rube and Garey. It would be better to endure the cold, than risk our scalps—thus counselled they.

But for all that, Rube had no idea of being starved to death He could kindle a fire, and burn it upon an open prairie, without the least fear of its being seen; and in a few minutes' time he had succeeded in making one, that could not have been discerned by the most sharp-sighted Indian in creation.

I had watched the operation with some interest.

He first collected a quantity of dead leaves, dry grass, and short sticks of the mezquite tree—all of which he placed under his saddle-blanket to prevent the rain and sleet from wetting them. This done, he drew out his bowie knife, and, with the blade, "croned" a hole into the turf about a foot deep, and ten inches or a foot in diameter. In the bottom of this hole he placed the grass and leaves, having first ignited them by means of his flint, steel and "punk" tinder—all of which implements formed part of the contents of Rube's pouch and possible sack *au présent*. On the top of the now blazing leaves and grass, he placed the dry sticks, first the smaller ones and then those of larger dimensions, until the hole was filled up to the brim, and over all he laid the piece of turf originally cut from the surface, and which fitted as neatly as a lid.

His furnace being now finished, the trapper "hunkered" down close to its edge in such a position as to embrace the fire between his thighs, and have it nearly under him. He then drew his old blanket over his shoulders, allowing it to droop behind until he had secured it under the salient points of his lank, angular hips. In front he passed the blanket over his knees, and both ends, reaching the ground, were griped tightly between his toes.

The contrivance was complete, and there sat the old trapper like a hand-glass over a plant of spring rhubarb, a slight smoke oozing through the apertures of his scant blanket, and curling

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up around his "ears," as though he was hatching upon a hot-bed. But no fire could be seen, though Rube shivered no longer.

He soon found imitators. The young trapper had already constructed a similar furnace, and the others were soon warming themselves by this simple but ingenious device.

I did not disdain to avail myself of the extra "shaft" which the kind-hearted Garey had sunk for my accommodation, and having placed myself by its side, and drawn the ample robe over my shoulders, I felt as warm as if seated in front of a sea-coal fire.

Under other circumstances, I might have joined in the merriment produced in my companions by the ludicrous spectacle which we presented. A comic spectacle indeed—nine of us squatted at intervals over the ground—the blue smoke escaping through the interstices of our robes and blankets, and rising around our heads, as though one and all of us were on fire!

Wind, sleet and darkness continued throughout the whole night—cold wind, sharp icy sleet and black darkness, that seemed palpable to the touch. Ever so eager, ever so fresh, we could not have advanced along the trail. Grand war-trail as it was, it could not have been traced under that amorphous obscurity, and we had no means of carrying a light, even had it been safe to do so. We had no lantern, and the norther, with one blast, would have whisked out a torch of pitch-pine.

We thought no more of going forward, until either the day should break, or the fierce storm should lull.

At midnight we replenished our fires, and remained on the ground. Hail, rain, wind and darkness. My companions rested their heads upon their knees, or nodding, slept. No sleep for me—not even the repose of thought. Like some fevered sufferer on his wakeful couch, I counted the hours—the minutes. The minutes seemed hours.

Rain, hail, sleet and wind seemed like darkness itself to belong

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to the night. As long as night lasted, so long continued they When it came to an end, all vanished together—the norther had exhausted its strength.

A wild turkey, killed before nightfall, with some steaks of the peccary-pork, furnished us with an ample breakfast. It was hastily cooked, and hastily eaten; and as the first streaks of dawn appeared along the horizon, we were in our saddles, and advancing upon the trail.

CHAPTER LXXX.

A RED EPISTLE.

The trail led northwest, as written upon the maguey. No doubt she had heard her captors forespeak their plans. I knew that she herself understood something of the Comanche language. The accomplishment may appear strange, and not strange either when it is known that with her it was a native tongue. Her mother could have spoken it well.

But, even without this knowledge she might still have learnt the designs of the savages—for these southern Comanches are accomplished linguists—many of them can speak the beautiful language of Andalusia. There was a time when a portion of the tribe submitted to the teaching of the mission padres; a few among them might even boast—which they do not—of Iberian blood!

No doubt, Isolina in their midst had overheard them discussing their projects.

We had ridden about two hours, when we came upon the ground where the Indians had made their night camp.

We approached it warily and with stealth, for we were now travelling with great caution. We had need. Should a single savage, straying behind, set eyes upon us we might as well be

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seen by the whole band. If discovered upon the war-trail, our lives would not be worth much. Some of us might escape; but at least our plan would be completely frustrated.

I say plan, for I had formed one. During the long vigil of the night my thoughts had not been idle, and a course of action I had traced out, though it was not yet fully developed in my mind. Circumstances might alter it or aid me in its execution.

We approached their night encampment then, warily and with stealth. The smoke of its smouldering fires pointed out the places, and warned us from afar. We found it quite deserted, the gaunt wolf and coyote alone occupying the ground, disputing with each other possession of the hide and bones of a horse, the debris of the Indian breakfast.

Had we not known already, the trappers could have told by the sign of the camp to what tribe the Indians belonged.

There were still standing the poles of a tent—only one—doubtless the lodge of the head chief. The poles were temporary ones—saplings, cut from the adjacent thicket. They were placed in a circle, and meeting at the top, were tied together with a piece of thong, so that when covered, the lodge would have exhibited the form of a perfect cone. This we knew was the fashion of the Comanche tent.

"Ef't hed a been Kickapoo," said Rube, who took the opportunity of displaying his knowledge, "thu'd a bent thur poles in'ard, so's to make a sort o' a roun top d'ee see, an' ef 't hed a been Wacoes or Witcheetees they'd a left a hole at the top to let out thur smoke. Delawurs and Shawnee wud a hed tents jest like whites, but thet ar ain't thur way o' makin' a fire. In Shawnee fire the logs wud a been laid in, one end turned in, and the tother turned out, jest like the star on a Texan flag, or the spokes o' a wheel. Likeways Cherokee an' Choctaw wud a hed reglar tents, but thur fire wud a been alser diff'runt They'd a sot the logs purallel, side by side, an' lit em only at one end, an' then pushed em up as fast as they burn'd. That'r

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thur way. Ee see these hyur logs is sot diff'rint, thur lit in the middle, an' thet's Kimanch for sartint it ur."

Rube's knowledge extended farther. The savages had been astart as early as ourselves. They had decamped about daylight, and were now exactly two hours ahead of us on the trail Why were they travelling so rapidly? Not from fear of pursuit by an enemy. The soldiers of Mexico—had they regarded these—were too busy with the Saxon foe, and *vice versa*. They could hardly be expecting *us* to make an expedition to rob them of their captives. Perhaps they were driving forward to be in time for the great herds of buffalo that, along with the cold weather, might now be looked for in the north of the Comanche range. This was the explanation of the trappers—most probably the true one.

Under the influence of singular emotions I rode over the ground. There were other signs beside those of the savage; signs of the plunder with which they were laden. Signs of civilization. There were fragments of broken cups, and musical instruments; torn leaves of books; remnants of dresses, silks and velvets; a small satin slipper (the peculiar *chaussure* of the Mexican manola—upon whose foot worn?) side by side with a worn-out, mud-stained moccasin—fit emblems of savage and civilized live. There was no time for speculating on such a curious confusion. I was looking for signs of her—for traces of my betrothed. I cast around me inquiring glances.

Where was it probable she had passed the night? Where?

Involuntarily my eyes rested upon the naked poles—the tent of the chief. How could it be otherwise? Who among all the captives like her? grandly beautiful, to satisfy the eye even of a savage chieftain—grandly, magnificently beautiful, how could she escape his notice? There in his lodge, shrouded under the brown skin of buffaloes, under hideous devices—in the arms of a painted, red-bedaubed savage—his arms, brown and greasy—embraced—oh!—

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"Young fellur! I arn't much o' a skoller, but I'd stake a pack o' beaver plew agin a plug o' Jeemes' River that this hyar manerscrip war entended for yurself, and nob'dy else. Thur's writin' upon it, thet's clur, an' mighty keu'rous ink, I reck'n, thet ur. Oncest on a time I kud a read, write or print eyethur, as easy as fallin' off a log—for thur wur a Yankee fellur on Duck Crick that kep a pretty consid'able school thur, and the ole 'oman, that ur Mrs. Rawlins, hed this child put thro' a reglar coorse o' the Testymint. I remembers readin' 'bout thet ur cussed nigger as toated the possible-sack—Judeas, ef I recollex right, wur the durned raskul's name—ef I kud a laid claws on him, I'd a raised his har in the shakin' o' a goat's tail. Wagh! thet I wud."

Rube's indignation against the betrayer having reached its climax, brought his speech to a termination.

I had not waited for its finale. The object which he held between his fingers had more interest for me than either the history of his own early days, or the story of the betrayer. It was a paper—a note—actually folded, and addressed, "Warfield!" He had found it upon the grass, close to where the tent had stood, and held in the crotch of a split stick, the other end of which was stuck into the ground.

No wonder the trapper had remarked upon the ink. There was no mistaking the character of that lurid red. The writing was in *blood!*

Hastily unfolding the paper, I read:

"Henri! I am still safe, but in dread of a sad fate—the fate of the poor white captive, among these hideous men. Last night I feared it, but the Virgin shielded me. It has not come. Oh! I shall not submit. I shall die by my own hand. A strange chance has hitherto saved me from this horrid outrage. No! it was not chance, but Heaven that interposed. It is thus: Two of my captors claim me—one the son of the chief—the

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ther, the wretch to whom you granted life and freedom. Would to God it had been otherwise! Of the two, he of white blood is the viler savage—bad—brutal—a very demon. Both took part in capture of the steed—therefore both claim me as their 'property.' The claim is not yet adjusted, hence have I been spared; but, alas! I fear my hour is nigh. A council is to be held that will decide to which of these monsters I am to be given. If to either, it is a horrid fate; if to neither, a doom still more horrible—perchance you know their custom. I should be common property—the victim of all. *Dios de mi alma!* Never—never! Death—welcome death!

"Fear not, Henri, lord of my heart! fear not that I shall dishonor your love—no—sacred in my breast its purity shall be preserved—even at the sacrifice of my life. I shall bathe it in the blood of my heart. Ah me! my heart is bleeding now! They come to drag me away. Farewell! farewell!"

Such were the contents of the page—the fly leaf of a torn missal. Upon the other side was a vignette—a picture of Dolores, the weeping saint of Mexico! Had it been chosen, the emblem could scarce have been more appropriate.

I thrust the red writing into my bosom, and without waiting to exchange a word with my companions, pressed forward upon the trail.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MORE WRITING IN RED.

The men followed as before. I needed no trackers to show the way. The path was plain as a driver's road—a thousand horses had made their mark upon the ground.

We rode at a regular pace—not rapidly. I was in no hurry

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to come up with the savages. I desired not to get sight of them before nightfall. It would be better not—lest they might also get sight of us.

The plan I proposed to myself for the rescue of my betrothed could not be accomplished in the day. Darkness alone could avail me in carrying it out, and for nightfall must I wait.

We could easily have overtaken the savages before night. They were but two short hours in advance, and would be certain, as is their custom on the war-trail, to make a noon halt of several hours' duration. Even Indian horses require to be rested.

We calculated the rate at which they were travelling—how many miles to the hour; the prairie men could tell to a furlong both the gait and the distance. The tracks of the poor captives were still seen along the trail. This showed that the party could not have been going faster than a walk.

The prairie-men alleged there were many horses without riders—led or driven—many mules too—the product of the foray. Why were the poor captives not permitted to ride them?

Was it sheer cruelty, or brutal indifference, on the part of their captors? Did the inhuman monsters gloat over the sufferings of these unfortunates, and deny them even the alleviation of physical pain? The affirmative answer to all these questions was probably the true one—since hardly better—no better indeed—is the behavior of these savages towards the women of their own blood and kind—the squaws.

Talk not to me of the noble savage, of the simplicity and gentleness of that condition falsely termed a state of nature. It is not nature. God meant not man to be a wild Ishmaelite on the face of the earth. Man was made for civilization—for society, and only under its influence does he assume the form and grace of true nobility. Leave him to himself—to the play of his instincts—to the indulgence of evil impulses, and man

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becomes a brute--a beast of prey. Even worse, for wolf and tiger gently consort with their kind, and still more gently with their family. They feel the tenderness of a family tie. Where is the savage upon all the earth who does not usurp dominion—who does not practise the meanest tyranny on his weaker mate? Where can you find him? Not on the blood-stained Karroos of Africa—not upon the forest plains of the Amazon—not by the icy shores of the Arctic Sea—certainly not on the prairie of North America.

No man can be noble who would, in wrath, lay his finger upon weaker woman; talk not then of the noble savage—fancy of poets—myth of romance!

The tracks of riderless horses, the footsteps of walking women, tender girls and children, upon that tiresome trail, had for me a cruel significance—those slende tiny tracks of pretty feet—*pobres niños!*

There was one that fixed my attention more than the rest Every now and then my eyes were upon it. I fancied I could dentify it. It was exactly the size, I thought. The perfect symmetry and configuration—the oval curve of the heel—high instep—the row of small graduated globes, made by the impression of the toes—the smooth surface left by the imprint of the delicate epidermis—all these points seemed to characterize the footprints of a lady.

Surely it could not be hers? Surely she would not be toiling along that weary track? Cruel as were the hearts of her captors—brutal as were their natures, surely they would not inflict this unnecessary pain. Beauty like hers should command kind treatment—should inspire compassion even in the breast of a savage! Alas! I deemed it doubtful.

We rode slowly on, not desirous of overtaking the foe, we were allowing them time to depart from their noon resting-place. We might as well have stopped for a while, but I could not submit to the repose of a halt. Motion, however slow, ap-

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peared progress; and in some measure hindered me from dwelling upon thought, that only produced useless pain.

Notwithstanding the incumbrance of their spoils, the Indians must have been travelling faster than we. They had no fear of foes to retard them, naught to require either spies or caution. They were now in their own country, in the very heart of the Comanche range, and in dread of no enemy. They were moving fresher, and without fear. We on the contrary had to keep our scouts in the advance. Every bend of the road had to be reconnoitred by them, every bush examined, every swell of the ground approached with extreme care and watchfulness.

These manœuvres occupied time, and we moved slowly enough.

It was after midday when we arrived at the noon camp of the savages. They had kindled fires and cooked flesh. The smoke, as before, warned us, and approaching under cover, we perceived that they were gone. The bones, clean-picked, were easily identified, and told that the midday meal had made no change in the diet of these hippophagists, dinner and *déjeûner* had been alike drawn from the same larder.

Again I searched the ground; but as before, the eyes of the trapper proved better than mine.

"Hyur's a other billet dux, young fellur," said he, handing me the paper.

Another leaf from the missal!

I seized it eagerly--eagerly I devoured its contents. This time they were more brief:

"*Once more I open my veins. The council meets to-night. In a few hours it will be decided whose property I am—whose slave—whose—— Santisima Maria! I cannot write the word. I shall attempt to escape. They leave my hands free, but my limbs are tight bound with thongs. I have tried to undo my fastening, but cannot. Oh, if I had but a knife I know where one is kept—a keen blade*

I may contrive to seize it, but it must be in the last moment—It will not do to fail. Henri, I am firm and resolute. I do not yield to despair, one way or other. I shall free myself from the hideous embrace of —— They come—the villain watches me! I must" ——

The writing ended abruptly. Her jailers had interrupted her. The paper had evidently been concealed from them in haste. It had been suddenly crumpled up and flung upon the grass, for so was it when found. * * * * *

We remained for a while upon the spot to rest and refresh our horses. The poor brutes needed both. There was water at the place, and that might not be met with again.

The sun was far down when we resumed our march—our last march along the war-trail.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

AN INJUN ON THE BACK TRACK.

We had advanced about a mile farther when our scouts, who, as usual, had gone forward to reconnoitre, having ascended a swell of the prairie, were observed crouching behind some bushes that grew upon its crest. We all drew bridle to await the result of their reconnoissance. The peculiar attitude in which they had placed themselves, the apparent earnestness with which they glanced over the bushes, led us to believe that some object was before their eyes of more than common interest.

So it proved. We had scarcely halted, when they were seen to retire suddenly from the bushes, and rising erect, run at full speed back down the hill—at the same time making signals to us to conceal both ourselves and our horses.

Fortunately, there was timber near, and in a few seconds, we

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had all ridden into it, taking the horses of the trappers along with us.

The declivity of the hill enabled the scouts to run with swiftness; and they were among the trees almost as soon as we.

"What is it?" inquired several in a breath.

"Injun on the back track," replied the panting trappers.

"Indians!—how many of them?" naturally asked one of the rangers.

"Who sayed Injuns? I sayed a Injun," sharply retorted Rube. "Dam yur palaver! thur's no time fur yur waggun. Git yur rope ready, Bill—'ee durned greenhorns, keep down yur guns—shootin' wont do hyur—yu'd hev the hul gang back in the flappin' o' a beaver's tail. Let Bill rope the niggur an' the young fellur hyur—he knows how—an' ef both shed miss 'im, I aint a gwine. 'Ee hear me, fellurs?—don't ne'er a one o' ve fire—ef a gun ur wanted, Targuts 'll be surficient, I guess—but for yur lives don't a fire them ur blunderbusses o' yourn till I miss—they'd be heerd ten mile off. Ready ur yur rope, Billce? you, young fellur? All right, mind your eyes both, and snare the durned niggur like a swamp rabbit. Yanner he comes, by the jumpin' Geehosophat!"

The pithy chapter of instructions above detailed, was delivered in far less time than it may take to read it. The speaker never paused till he had uttered the final emphatic shibboleth, which was one of his favorite phrases of embellishment.

At the same instant, I saw just appearing above the crest of the ridge the head and shoulders of a savage. In a few seconds more, the body was in sight, and then thighs and legs, with a large piebald mustang between them. I need scarcely add, that the horse was going at a gallop. It is a rare sight when a horse-Indian rides any other gait.

There was only one. The scouts were sure of this. Beyond the swell stretched an open prairie, and if the Indian had had companions or followers, they would have been seen. He was alone

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What had brought him back upon the trail? Was he upon the scout? No—he was riding without thought, and without precaution. A scout would have acted otherwise. He might have been a messenger, but whither bound? Surely the Indians had left no party in our rear!

Quick these inquiries passed among us, from mouth to mouth, and quick conjectures were offered in answer. The voyageur gave the most probable solution.

"Pe gar! he go back for ze sheel."

"Shield! what shield?"

"Ah! you no see 'im. I see 'im wis me eyes—he vas caché dans les herbes—von large sheel—bouclier très gros—fabriqué from ze peau of de buffle, ze parflèche, et garni avec les scalps, —frais et sanglants—scalps Mexicains. Mon dieu!"

The explanation was understood. Le Blanc had observed a shield among the bushes where we had halted, like enough left behind by some of the braves. It was garnished with scalps—fresh Mexican scalps—like enough the Indian had forgotten both his armor and his trophies. He was on his way to recover them. Like enough.

There was no time either for farther talk or conjecture. The red horseman had reached the bottom of the hill, in ten seconds more he would be lazoed or shot.

Garey and I placed ourselves on opposite sides of the path—both with our lazoes coiled and ready. The trapper was an adept in the use of this singular weapon, and I too understood something of its *manége*. The trees were somewhat in our way, and would have prevented the proper winding of it, but it was our intention to spur clear of the timber, the moment the Indian came within range, and "rope" him on the run.

Rube crouched behind Garey, rifle in hand, and the rangers were also ready in case both the lazoes and Rube's rifle should miss.

It would not do to let the Indian either go on or go back

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In either case he would report us. Should he pass the spot where we were, he would observe our tracks in a minute's time, even amidst the thousands of others, and would be certain to return by another route. Should he escape from us and gallop back, still worse. He must not be permitted either to go on or go back. He must be captured or killed!

For my part, I desired that the former should be his destiny. I had no feeling of revenge to gratify by taking the life of this red man, and had his capture not been absolutely necessary to our own safety, I should willingly have let him come and go as he listed.

Some of my comrades were actuated by different motives; killing a Comanche Indian was, in their creed, no greater crime than killing a wolf, a panther, or a grizzly bear; and it was not from any motives of mercy that the trapper had cautioned others to hold their fire. Prudence alone directed the advice. The reports of the guns might be heard.

Through the leaves I looked upon the savage as he advanced. A fine looking fellow he was, and no doubt one of the first warriors of his tribe. What his face was I could not see, for the war paint disfigured it with hideous devices; but his body was large, his chest broad and full, his limbs symmetrical, and well turned to the very toes. He sat his horse like a Centaur.

I had no opportunity for prolonged observation. Without hesitating, the Indian galloped up.

I sprung my horse clear of the timber. I wound the lasso round my head, and hurled it towards the savage. I saw the noose settling over his shoulders, even down to his hips.

I spurred in the opposite direction. I felt the quick jerk, and the taut rope told me I had secured the victim.

I turned in my saddle and glanced back. I saw the rope of Garey around the neck of the Indian's mustang, tightened and holding him fast. Horse and horseman—both were ours!

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CHAPTER LXXXIII.

CAPTURING A COMANCHE

The savage did not yield himself up without resistance. Resistance with an Indian is instinctive, as with a wild animal. He flung himself from his horse, and drawing his knife, with a single cut severed the thong that bound him.

In another instant he would have been off among the bushes, but before he could move from the spot, half a dozen strong arms were around him, and in spite of his struggles, and the dangerous thrusts of his long Spanish knife, he was "choked" down and held fast.

My followers were for making short work with him. More than one had bared their blades to finish him upon the spot—and would have done so had I not interfered. I was averse to spilling his blood, and at my command, or entreaty, his life was spared.

To prevent him from giving us farther trouble, however, we tied him to a tree, in such a manner that he could not possibly free himself.

The mode of securing him was suggested by Stanfield, the backwoodsman It was simple and safe. A tree was chosen whose trunk was large enough to fill the embrace of the savage, so that the ends of his fingers scarce met when his arms were drawn to their full stretch around it; upon his wrists thongs of raw hide were firmly knotted, and then tied together His ankles were also bound by similar cords, the ends of which were staked, so as to hinder him from worming around the tree, and perchance wearing off his fastenings, or chafing them so that they might break.

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The ligature was perfect. The most expert jail-breaker could not have freed himself from such a binding.

It was our intention to leave him thus, and *perhaps* set him free upon our return, if we should return by that way—a doubtful hypothesis.

I thought not at the time of the cruelty we were committing. We had spared the Indian's life—a mercy at the moment, and I was too much concerned about the future of others to waste reflection on his. We had taken the precaution to place him at some distance from the trail. Others of his party might come after and discover him soon enough to interfere with our plans. His prison had been chosen far off in the depth of the woods. Even his shouts could not have been heard by any one passing along the trail.

He was not to be left entirely alone. A horse was to be his companion—not his own, for one of the rangers had fancied an exchange. Stanfield, not well mounted, proposed a "swap," as he jocosely termed it, to which the savage had no alternative but consent; and the Kentuckian, having "hitched" his worn out nag to a tree, led off the skew-bald mustang in triumph, declaring that he was now "squar wi' the Indyens." Stanfield would have liked it better had the "swap" been made with the renegade who had robbed him.

We were about to leave the place and move on, when a bright idea suddenly came into my head. It occurred to me that I, too, might effect a profitable exchange with our new-made captive—a swap, not of horses, but of men—in short, an exchange of persons—of identities!

In truth, a bright idea it was, and one that promised well.

I have said that I had already conceived a plan for the rescue of my betrothed. I had done so during the night, and all along the route in my mind I had been maturing it.

The incident that had just transpired had given rise to a host of new ideas one above all that promised to aid me in facilitat

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ing the execution of my design. The capture of the savage, which had at first given me uneasiness, I now regarded in a very different light—as a fortunate circumstance. I could not help thinking that I recognized in it the finger of Providence, and the thought inspired me with hope I felt that I was not forsaken

The plan I had proposed to myself was simple enough. It would require more of courage than stratagem; but to the former I was sufficiently nerved by the desperate circumstances in which we had become involved. I proposed to enter the Indian camp in the night—of course by stealth and under cover of darkness—to find the captive, set her limbs free, and then trust to chance for the after escape of both of us.

If once inside the encampment, and within reach of her, a sudden *coup* might accomplish all this. Success was not beyond possibility, nor probability neither—and the circumstances admitted of no plan that promised so fairly.

To have attempted fight with my few followers against such a host—to have attacked the Indian camp, even under the advantage of an alarm—would have been sheer madness. It must have resulted not only in my own immediate defeat, but would have destroyed our last chance of rescuing the captive. The savages once alarmed and warned, could never be approached again. Isolina would be lost for ever.

My followers agreed with me upon the imprudence of an attack. Folly they termed it; not from any motives of fear: they were willing to risk all, and had I so ordered, would have charged with me, rifle in hand, into the very midst of the enemy's lines. I knew they would, every man of them Even the voyageur, the least brave of my party, would not have flinched, for in the midst of brave men, cowards cease to be.

But such a course would indeed have been folly—madness we thought not of adopting it; all approved of the plan I had formed, and what I had already set before them as we tarried by the noon halting-place.

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Several had volunteered to be my companions—to venture along with me into the camp of the savages, to share with me the extreme of the danger; but for several reasons I was determined to go alone. Should even one of them be along with me, I saw it would double the risk of detection. Stratagem, not strength, was needed; and speed in the last moments would be worth both.

Of course I did not expect to get the captive clear without being observed and pursued. That would have been preposterous. She would be too well watched by savages—not only by her jailers, but by the jealous eyes of those rival claimants of her body.

No, on the contrary I anticipated pursuit—close and eager; it might be strife; but I trusted to my own swiftness of foot, and to hers—for well knew I the bold heart and free limb—it was no helpless burden I should have to bring away.

I trusted to my being able to baffle their pursuit—to keep them back while she ran forward. For that purpose I should have with me my knife and revolvers. I trusted to these, and much to chance, or perhaps I should rather say, to God. My cause was good—my heart firm and hopeful.

Other precautions I intended to take. Horses ready, as near as they might be brought—men also ready seated in their saddles, rifle in hand, ready for fight or flight.

Such was the enterprise upon which I was resolved. Success or death the issue. If not successful, I cared not to survive it.

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CHAPTER LXXXIV.

"PAINTING INJUN."

WITHAL, I was not reckless. If not sanguine, I was far from despondent; and as I continued to dwell upon it, the prospect seemed to brighten, and success became less problematical.

One of the chief difficulties I would have to encounter, would be getting into the camp. Once inside the lines—that is, among the camp-fires and tents, if there should be any—I would be comparatively safe. This I knew from experience; for it would not be my first visit to an encampment of prairie Indians. Even in the midst, mingling with the savages themselves, and under the light of their glowing fires, I should be less exposed to the danger of detection than while attempting to cross their lines. First, there might be out-lying pickets; then, within these, the horse-guards; and within these again, the horses themselves!

You may smile, when I assert that the last was to me a source of apprehension as great as either of the others. An Indian horse is a sentinel not to be despised. He is as much the enemy of the white man as his master; and, partly from fear and partly from actual antipathy, he will not permit the former to approach him. The human watcher may be negligent—may sleep upon his post—the mustang never. The smell of a white man, or the sight of a skulking form, will cause him to snort and neigh—so that a whole camp will either be stampeded or put upon the alert in a few minutes. Many a well-planned attack has been defeated by the warning snort of the sentinel-horse.

It is not that the prairie-horse feels any peculiar attachment for the Indian. Strange if he did—since tyrant more cruel to

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the equine race does not exist—no driver more severe, no rider more hard, than a horse Indian. It is simply the faithfulness which the noble animal exhibits for his companion and master, with the instinct which tells him when that master is menaced by danger. He will do the same service for a white as for a red man; and often does the weary trapper take his lone rest, with full confidence that the vigil will be faithfully kept by his horse

Had there been dogs in the Indian camp, my apprehensions would have been still more acute; the danger would have been more than doubled. Even within the lines these cunning brutes would have known me as an enemy. The disguise of garments would not avail. By the scent, an Indian dog can at once tell the white from the red man, and they appear to hold a real antipathy against the race of the Saxon. Even in time of truce, a white man entering an Indian camp can scarce be protected from the wolfish pack.

I knew there were no dogs—we saw tracks of none. The Indians had been on the war-trail, and when they proceed on these grand expeditions, their dogs, like their women, are left "at home." I had reason to be thankful that such was their custom.

Of course, it was my intention to go disguised. It would have been madness to have gone otherwise. In the darkest night my uniform would have betrayed me; necessarily, in my search for the captive I should be led within the light of the fires.

It was my design, therefore, to counterfeit the Indian costume, and how to do this had been for some time the subject of my reflections. I had been congratulating myself on the possession of the buffalo-robe. That would go far towards the disguise; but other articles were wanting to complete my costume. The leggings and moccassins; the plumed head-dress and neck ornaments; the long, straggling locks; the bronze complexion of arms and breast; the piebald face of chalk, charcoal, and ver

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milion—where were all these to be obtained? There was no *costumerie* in the desert.

In the moment of excitement that succeeded the capture of the savage, I had been thinking of other things. It was only when we were about to part from him that the idea jumped into my mind—that bright idea!—that *he* could *furnish* me—the very man.

I turned back to reconnoitre his person. Dismounting, I scanned him from head to foot. With delight my eyes rested upon his buckskin leggings—his bead-embroidered moccasins—his pendent collar of javali tusks—his eagle plumes, stained red—and the ample robe of jaguar-skins that draped his back—all pleased me much.

But that we were bent on an errand of peril, the last would not have been left there. My followers had eyed it with avidity, and more than one of them had been desirous of removing it; but proximate peril had damped the ardor for spoil, and the splendid robe had been permitted to remain, where so gracefully it hung, upon the shoulders of the savage. It soon replaced the buffalo-robe upon mine. My boots were cast aside, and my legs encased in the scalp-fringed leggings; my hips were swathed in the leathern "breech-clout," and my feet thrust into the foot-gear of the Comanche, which, by good fortune, fitted to a hair.

There was yet much required to make me an Indian. Comanches upon the war-trail go naked from the waist upward. The tunic shirt is only worn upon the hunt, or on ordinary occasions. How was I to counterfeit the copper skin? the bronzed arms and shoulders—the mottled breast—the face of red, and white, and black? Paint only could aid me, and where was paint to be procured? The black we could imitate with gunpowder, but ——

"Wagh!" ejaculated Rube, who was seen holding in his hands a wolf-skin, prettily trimmed and garnished with quills

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and beads. It was the medicine-bag of the Indian. "Wagh I thort we'd find the meteerils in the niggur's possible-sack, hyur they be."

Rube had dived his hand to the bottom of the embroidered bag; and, while speaking, drew it triumphantly forth. Several little leathern packets appeared between his fingers, which, from their stained outsides, evidently contained pigments of various colors, while a small, shining object in their midst proved, on closer inspection, to be a looking-glass!

Neither the trapper nor myself were astonished at finding these odd "notions" in such a place. On the contrary, it was natural we should have looked for them. Seldom in peace, but never in time of war, does the Indian ride abroad without his rouge and his mirror!

The colors were of the right sort, and corresponded exactly with those that glistened upon the skin of the captive warrior.

Under the keen edge of a bowie, my moustache came off in a twinkling. A little grease was procured; the paints were mixed; and placing myself side by side with the Indian, I stood for *his* portrait. Rube was the painter; a piece of soft buckskin his brush; the broad palm of Garey his palette.

The operation did not last a great while. In twenty minutes it was all over, and the Indian brave and I appeared the exact counterpart of each other. Streak by streak, and spot by spot, had the old trapper imitated those hideous hieroglyphics, even to the red hand upon the breast, and the cross upon the brow. In horrid aspect, the copy quite equalled the original.

One thing was still lacking—an important element in the metamorphosis of disguise. I wanted the long, snaky, black tresses that adorned the head of the Comanche.

The want was soon supplied. Again the bowie-blade was called upon to serve as scissors; and with Garey to perform the tonsorial feat, the chevelure of the Indian was shorn of its flowing glories.

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The savage winced as the keen blade glistened around his brow. He had no other thought than that he was about to be scalped alive!

"'Taint the way I'd raise his har, the Jod rotted niggur! Fotch the hide along wi' it, Bill! it'll save bother; ee'll hev to make a wig ef 'ee don't. Skin 'im, durn 'im!"

Of course, Garey did not give heed to the cruel counsel, which he knew was not meant for earnest.

A rude "scratch" was soon constructed, and, being placed upon my head, was attached to my own waving locks. Fortunately, these were of a dark color, and the hue corresponded.

I fancied I saw the Indian smile, when he perceived the use we were making of his splendid tresses. It was a grim smile, however; and from the first moment to the last, neither word nor ejaculation escaped from his lips.

Even I was forced to smile. I could not restrain myself. The odd travesty in which we were engaged, the strange commingling of the comic and serious in the act, and, above all, the ludicrous look of the captive Indian after they had close cropped him, was enough to make a stone smile. My comrades could not restrain themselves, but laughed outright.

The plume-bonnet was now placed on my head. It was fortunate the brave had one—for this magnificent headdress is rarely worn on a war-expedition—fortunate, for it aided materially in concealing the counterfeit. The false hair could hardly have been detected, even under the light of day.

There was no more to be done. The painter, hair-dresser, and costumier had performed their several offices. I was ready for the masquerade.

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CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE LAST HOURS ON THE TRAIL.

More cautiously than ever, we now crept along the trail—advancing only after the ground had been thoroughly "quartered" by the scouts. Time was of the least consequence. The fresh sign of the Indians told us they were but a short way ahead of us. We could have ridden within sight of them at any moment.

We did not wish to set eyes upon them before sunset. It could be no advantage to overtake them on the march—but the contrary. Some lagging Indian might be found in the rear of the band; we might come in contact with him, and thus defeat all our designs.

We hung back, therefore, allowing time for the savages to pitch their camp, and for the stragglers to get into it.

On the other hand, I had no desire to arrive late. The council was to be held that night—so she had learned—and after the council must come the crisis. I must be in time for both.

At what hour would the council take place? It might be just after they had halted.

The son of a chief, and a chief himself—for the white renegade was a leader of red men—a question between two such men would not remain long undecided. And a question of so much importance—involving such consequences—property in body and soul—possession of the most beautiful woman in the world!

Oh! I wondered, could these hideous ochre-stained, grease-bedaubed brutes, appreciate that peerless beauty? Impossible, I thought. The delicate lines of her loveliness would be lost upon their gross eyes and coarse sensual hearts. That pearl

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beyond price—paste would have satisfied them as well—they could not distinguish the diamond from common glass.

And yet the Comanche is not without love-craft. Coarse as might be the passion, they must have loved her—both must ave loved her—red savage and white savage.

For this very reason the "trial" would not be delayed. The question would be speedily decided, so that the quarrel of the chiefs might be brought to an end. For this very reason the crisis might be hastened, the council take place at an early hour; for this very reason I, too, must needs be upon the spot at an early hour.

It was my aim to arrive within sight of the Indian encampment just before night—in the twilight, if possible—that we might be able to make recognizance of the ground before darkness would cover it from our view. We were desirous of acquainting ourselves with the lay of the surrounding country as well, so that in the event of our escape, we should know which was the best direction to take.

We timed our advance by the sign upon the trail. The keen scouts could tell almost to a minute when the latest tracks were made, and by this we were guided. Both glided silently along their eyes constantly and earnestly turned upon the ground.

Mine were more anxiously bent upon the sky. From that quarter I most feared an obstacle to the execution of my purpose.

What a change had come over my desires. How different are they from those of the preceding night. The very same aspect of the heavens that had hitherto chagrined and baffled me, would now have been welcome. In my heart I had lately execrated the clouds—in that same heart I was now praying for cloud, and storm, and darkness.

Now could I have blessed the clouds, there were none to bless—not a speck appeared over the whole face of the firmament—the eye beheld only the illimitable ether.

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In another hour that boundless blue would be studded over with millions of bright stars, and silvered by the light of a resplendent moon—the night would be as day.

I was dismayed at the prospect. I prayed for cloud, and storm, and darkness. Human heart! unreasoning and unreasonable when blinded by its own petty passion. My petition was opposed to the unalterable laws of Nature—it could not be heard.

I can scarce describe how the aspect of that bright sky troubled and pained me. The night bird, who joys only in deepest darkness, could not have liked it less.

Should there be moonlight, the enterprise would be made more perilous—doubly more. Doubly more should there be moonlight—why need I form an hypothesis? Moonlight there *would* be to a certainty. It was the middle term of the lunar month, and the moon would be up almost as the sun went down—full, round, and almost as bright as he, with no cloud to cover her face—to shroud the earth from her white diaphanous light. Certainly there would be moonlight!

Well thought of us was that disguise! Well spent was our labor in making it so perfect! Under the moonlight, to it only could I trust. By it only might I expect to preserve my incognito.

But the eye of the Indian savage is sharp, and his perception keen—almost as instinct itself. I could not rely much upon my borrowed plumes, should speech be required from me. Just on account of the cunning imitation, the perfectness of the pattern, some of the friends of the original model might have business with me—might approach and address me. I knew not a word of Comanche—how should I escape from the colloquy?

Such thoughts were troubling me as we rode along the trail.

Night was near—the sun's lorn rival rested on the far horizon of the west—the hour was an anxious one to me.

The scouts had been for some time in the advance, without

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returning to report; and we had halted in a copse to wait for them. A high hill was before us, wooded only at the summit. Over this hill the war-trail led. We had observed the scouts to go into the timber, and we kept our eyes upon the spot, waiting for their return.

Presently, one of them appeared just outside the edge of the woods. Garey we saw it was. He made signs to us to come on.

We rode up to the hill, and entered among the trees. Here we diverged from the trail. The scout guided us through the trunks, over the high summit. On the other side the wood extended only a little below, but we did not ride beyond it. We halted before coming to its edge, and, dismounting, tied our horses to the trees.

We crept forward on our hands and knees, till we had reached the outmost verge of the timber. Through the leaves we peered, looking down into the plain beyond. We saw smokes and fires, and a skin lodge in their midst. We saw dark forms around—men moving over the ground, and horses with their heads to the grass We were looking upon the Comanche camp

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE COMANCHE CAMP.

We had reached our ground just at the moment I had desired. It was twilight—dark enough to render ourselves inconspicuous under the additional shadow of the trees, yet sufficiently clear to allow a full reconnoissance of the enemy's position. Our point of view was a good one—under a single *coup d'œil* commanding the encampment, and a vast extent of country around it. The hill we had climbed—a sort of isolated

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butte—was the only eminence of any considerable elevation for miles around, and the site of the camp was upon the plain that stretched away from its base, apparently beyond limit.

This plain was what is termed a "pecan" prairie—that is a prairie half covered with groves, copses and lists of woodland, in which the predominating tree is the pecan, a species of hickory, bearing an oval edible nut of commercial value (*Carya oliviformis*). Between the pores and "mottes" of timber single trees stood apart, their heads fully developed by the free play given to their branches. These park-looking trees, with the coppice-like groves of the pecan, lent an air of high civilization to the landscape, and the winding stream, whose water under the still lingering rays glistened with the sheen of silver, added to the deception. Withal, it was a wilderness—a beautiful wilderness. Human hands had never planted those groves—human agency had naught to do with the formation or adornment of that lovely landscape.

Upon the bank of the stream, and about half a mile from the base of the hill, stood the Indian camp. A glance at the position showed how well it had been chosen—not so much for defence, as to protect it against a surprise.

Assuming the lodge—there was but one—as the centre of the camp, it was placed upon the edge of a small grove, and fronting the stream. From the tent to the water's edge, the plain sloped gently downward like the glacis of a fortification. The smooth sward that covered the space between the trees and the water was the ground of the camp. On this could be seen the dusky warriors, some afoot, standing in various attitudes or moving about, others reclining upon the grass, and still others bending over the fires, as if engaged in the preparation of the evening meal

A line of spears, regularly placed, marked the allotment of each. These slender shafts—nearly five yards in length—rose tall above the turf, like masts of distant ships, displaying

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their profusion of pennons and bannerets of painted plumes and human hair. At the base of each could be seen the gaudy shield, the bow and quiver, the embroidered pouch, and the medicine-bag of the owner; and grouped around many of them appeared objects of a far different character—objects that we could not contemplate without acute emotion. They were women—enough of light still ruled the sky to show us their faces—they were white women—the captives. Strange were my sensations as I regarded those forms and faces, but they were far off. Even a lover's eye was unequal to the distance.

Flanking the camp, on right and left, were the horses. They occupied a broad belt of ground, for they were staked out to feed, and each was allowed the length of his lazo. Their line conveyed to the rear, and met behind the grove, so that the camp was embraced by an arc of browsing animals, the river forming its chord. Across the stream the encampment did not extend.

I have said that the spot was well selected to guard against a surprise. Its peculiar adaptability consisted in the fact, that the little grove that backed the camp, was the only timber within a radius of a thousand yards. All around, and even on the opposite side of the stream, the plain was treeless and free from cover of any kind. There were no inequalities of ground—neither break, bush, nor scaur—to shelter the approach of an enemy.

Had the position been chosen? or was it accidental? In such a place and at such a time it was not likely they had any fear of a surprise—but with the Indian, caution is so habitually exercised, that it becomes almost an instinct, and doubtless under such an impulse, and without any prethought whatever, the savages had aptly fixed upon the spot where they were encamped. The grove gave them wood, the stream water, the plain pabulum for their horses. With one of these last for their own food, they had all the requisites of an Indian camp.

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At the first glance, I saw the strength of their position Not so much with the eye of a soldier as that of a hunter and bush fighter did I perceive it. In a military sense, it offered no point of defence ; but it could not be approached by stratagem, and that is all the horse-Indian ever fears. Alarm him, not too suddenly give him five minutes' warning, and he cannot be attacked. If superior in strength, you may chase him, but you must be better mounted than he, to bring him to close combat. Retreat, not defence, is generally the leading idea of Comanche strategy, unless when opposed to a Mexican foe Then he will stand fight, with the courage of a master.

As I continued to gaze at the Indian encampment, my heart sank within me. Except under cover of a dark night—a very dark night—it could not be entered. The keenest spy could not have approached it—it appeared unapproachable.

The same thought must at that moment have occupied the minds of my companions. I saw the gloom of disappointment on the brows of all, silent and sullen. None of them said a word. They had not spoken since we came upon the ground.

What think you, reader, were the emotions that thrilled my soul as the conviction was forced upon me that she I sought was thus separated from me by an impassable barrier, the attempting to penetrate which would in all probability result in my own destruction and her inevitable captivity—the more prolonged and the more severe from the very fact that she had friends among the pale-faces—the bitter enemies of her captors. Although the impulses of my nature prompted me individually to dare every danger in the mad hope of rescuing Isolina, yet a moment's reflection convinced me of the inutility of the attempt, and I chafed like an untamed mustang which in vain draws upon the lazo which checks his flight

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CHAPTER LXXXVII.

NO COVER.

In silence I continued to scrutinize the camp, but could dis sover no mode of approaching it secretly, or in safety.

As I have said, the adjacent plain, for nearly a thousand yards' radius, was smooth grass-covered prairie. Even the grass was short. It would scarcely have sheltered the smallest game, much less afford shelter for the body of a man—much less for that of a horse.

I would willingly have crawled on hands and knees over the half mile that separated us from the encampment; but that would have been of no service. I might just as well have walked erect. Erect, or prostrate, I should be seen all the same by the occupants of the camp, or the guards of the horses. Even if I succeeded in effecting an entrance within the lines, what then? *Even* should I succeed in finding Isolina, what hope was there of our getting off?

There was no probability of our being able to leave the lines unseen—not the least. We should certainly be pursued, and what chance for us to escape? It was not probable we could run for a thousand yards with the hue and cry after us? No, we should be overtaken—re-captured—speared or tomahawked upon the spot!

The design I had formed was to have brought my horse as close as possible to the Indian lines—to have left him under cover, and within such distance as would make it possible to reach him by a run, then mounting with my betrothed in my arms, to allop to my comrades. These I had intended should be placed n ambush, as near to the camp as the nature of the ground would permit. But my preconceived plan was entirely frustrated by the peculiar situation of the Indian encampment. I had

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anticipated that there would be either trees, brushwood, or broken ground in its neighborhood, under shelter of which we might approach. To my chagrin there was none of the three. There was no timber nearer than the grove in which we were lying—the copse excepted, and to have reached this would have been to enter the camp itself.

We appeared to have advanced to the utmost limit possible that afforded cover. A few feet farther would have carried us outside the margin of the timber; and then we should have been as conspicuous to the denizens of the camp, as they now were to us. Forward we dare not stir, not a step farther.

I was puzzled, perplexed, chagrined.

Once more I turned my eyes upon the sky, but I drew not thence a ray of hope. The heavens were too bright. The sun had gone down in the west; but in the east was rising full, round, and red, almost his counterpart. How I should have welcomed an eclipse. I thought of omnipotent power. I thought of the command of the Israelitish captain. I should have joyed to see the shadow of the opaque earth pass over that shining orb, rob it of its borrowed light, if only for a single hour.

Eclipse or cloud there was none—no prospect of either—no hope either from the earth or the sky.

Verily then must I abandon my design, and adopt some other for the rescue of my betrothed? What other? I could think of no other that might be termed a plan. We might gallop forward, and openly attack the camp? Sheer desperation alone could impel to such a course, and the result would be ruin to all—to her among the rest. We could not hope to rescue her—nine to a hundred—for we saw and could now count our dusky foemen.

They would see us afar off—would be prepared to receive us prepared to hurl their masses upon us—to destroy us altogether—sheer desperation.

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What other plan? what ——

Something of one occurred to me at that moment. A slight shadow of it had crossed my mind before. It seemed, though fearfully perilous, practicable; but what of peril? It was not the time, nor was I in the mood to regard danger. Any thing short of the prospect of certain death had no terror for me then; and even this I should have preferred to failure

We had along with us the horse of the captive Comanche. Stanfield had brought the animal, having left his own in exchange. My new design was to mount the Indian horse, and ride him boldly into the camp. In this consisted the whole of my newly conceived scheme. Surely the idea was a good one—a slight alteration of my original plan. I had already undertaken to play the *rôle* of an Indian warrior, while within the camp; it would only require me to begin the personation outside the lines, and make my *entrée* along with *début*. There would be more dramatic appropriateness, with a proportionate increase of danger. But I did not jest thus. I had no thought of merriment at the time. The travesty I had undertaken was no burlesque.

The worst feature of the new scheme was the increased risk of being brought in contact with the friends of the warrior of the red-hand—of being accosted by them, and of course expected to make reply How could I avoid meeting them—one or more of them? If interrogated, how shun making answer? I knew a few words of the Comanche tongue, but not enough to hold a conversation in it. Either my false accent or my voice would betray me! True, I might answer in Spanish. Many of the Comanches speak this language; but my using it would appea a suspicious circumstance.

There was another source of apprehension. I could not confide in the Indian horse. He had endeavored to fling Stanfield all along the way, kicking violently, and biting at his rider while seated upon his back. Should he behave in a similar

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manner with me while entering the camp, it would attract the attention of the Indians. It would lead to scrutiny and suspicion.

Still another fear, even should I succeed in the main points, in entering the camp, finding the captive, and wresting her from the hands of her jailers—how after? I could never depend upon this capricious mustang to carry us clear of the pursuit—there would be others as swift, perhaps swifter than he, and we should only be carried back to die. Oh! that I could have taken my own steed near to the lines of yonder guard—oh! that I could have ridden him there.

It might not be; I saw that it could not be, and I was forced to abandon all thought of it.

I had well-nigh made up my mind to risk all the chances of my assumed character, by mounting the Indian horse. To my comrades I imparted the idea, and asked their counsel.

All regarded it as fraught with danger. One or two advised me against it. They were those who did not understand my motives—who could not comprehend the sentiment of love—who knew not the courage which that noble passion may impart. Little understood they how its emotions inspire to deeds of daring—how love absorbs all selfishness, even life becoming a secondary consideration, when weighed against the happiness or safety of its object. These men had never loved as I. I gave no ear to their too prudent counsels.

Others acknowledged the danger, but saw not how I could act differently. One or two of them had, in their lives' course, experienced a touch of the tender feeling akin to mine. These could appreciate; and counselled me in consonance with my half-formed resolution. I liked their counsel best.

One had not yet spoken—one upon whose advice I placed a higher value than upon the combined wisdom of all the others. I had not yet had the opinion of the earless trapper.

Oh, how I longed to hear him speak—reflective—taciturn—

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brave and sagacious Rube! I felt as if his assent or dissent would decide my wavering—for his judgment was ever clear, cool, and calculating all the chances of success, or danger of defeat.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

RUBE CONSULTING HIS ORACLE.

He was standing apart from the rest—leaning I should rather say, for his body was not erect, but diagonal. In this attitude it was propped by his rifle, the butt of which was steadied against the stump of a tree, while the muzzle appeared to rest upon the bridge of Rube's own nose.

As the man and the piece were about of a length, the two thus placed in juxtaposition presented the exact figure of an inverted V, and the small close-capped skull of the trapper formed a sufficiently tapering apex to the angle. Both hands were clasped round the barrel near its muzzle, his fingers interlocking while the thumbs lay flat, one upon each side of his nose

At the first glance it was difficult to tell whether he was gazing into the barrel of the piece, or beyond it upon the Indian camp.

The attitude was not new to him, nor to me. It was not the first time I had observed him in a posture precisely similar. I knew it was his favorite *pose*, when any question of unusual difficulty required all the energy of his "instincts." He was now, as often of yore, consulting his "divinity," presumed to dwell far down within the dark tube of "Targuts."

After a time all the others ceased to speak, and stood watching him. They knew that no step would be taken before Rube's advice had been received, and they waited with more or less patience for him to speak.

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So true is it, that among no class of men is such deference paid to sagacity and courage as among the trappers and hunters, who are compelled to rely so much upon their "gifts" or "instincts," as they term them—which is certainly a misnomer, as they are not attained save by years of experience and study in the school of woodcraft.

Full ten minutes passed, and still the old trapper neither stirred nor spoke. Nor lip nor muscle of him was seen to move. The eyes alone could be detected in motion, and these small orbs, scintillating in their deep sockets, were the only signs of life which he showed. Standing rigid and still, he appeared not a statue but a scarecrow propped up by a stick, and the long, weather-washed rifle did not belie the resemblance. Full ten minutes passed, and still he spoke not. His "oracle" had not yet yielded its response.

I have said that at the first glance it was difficult to tell whether the old man was gazing into the barrel of his gun or beyond it. After watching him closely, I saw that he was doing both. Now his eyes were a little raised, as if he looked upon the plain, anon they were lowered, and evidently peering into the hollow tube. He was drawing the data of his problem from facts—he was trusting to his divinity for the solution.

For a long time he kept up this singular process of conjuration, alternating his glances in equal distribution between the hollow cylinder and the small circle of vision that covered the Indian camp.

The others began to grow impatient; all were interested in the result, and not without reason. Standing upon the limits of a life-danger, it is not strange they should feel anxiety abou the issue.

So far, however, none had offered to interrupt or question the queer old man. None dared. One or two of the party had already had a taste of his quality when fretted or interfered with, and no one desired to draw upon himself the sharp "talk" of the earless trapper.

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Garey at length approached, but not until Rube, with a triumphant toss of his head and a scarcely audible "whoop" from his thin lips, showed signs that the consultation had ended, and that the "joss" who dwelt at the bottom of his rifle barrel, had vouchsafed an answer!

I had watched him with the rest. I liked that expressive pitch of the head; I liked the low but momentous sibillation that terminated the *séance* between him and his familiar spirit. They were signs that the knot was unravelled—that the old trapper had devised some possible plan, by which the Indian camp might be entered.

Garey and I drew near, but not to question him. We understood him too well for that. We knew that he must be left free to develop his purpose in his own time; and we left him free—simply placing ourselves by his side.

"Wal, Billee!" he said, after drawing a long breath, "an' yerself, young fellur, what d'ee both think o' this hyur bizness—looks ugly, don't it—eh, boyees?"

"Taint ugly," was Garey's laconic answer.

"Tho't so meeself at first."

"Thar aint no plan o' fightin' into thar camp," said the young trapper, in a desponding tone.

"The h— thur aint! What greenhorn put thet idee into yur brain-pan, Bill?"

"Wal, thar are a plan, but taint much o' a one. We've been talkin' it over hyar."

"Le's hear it," responded Rube, with an exulting chuckle; "le's hev it, boyee! an' quick Bill, fur time's dodrotted precious 'bout now. Wal?"

"Its jest this, Rube, nyther less nor more—the capt'in proposes to take the Injun's horse, and ride straight into thar camp."

"Strait custrut in do'ee?"

"In course—it ud be no use gwine about the bush—they kin see him a comin' from any side."

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"I'll be durned ef they kin—thet I'll be durned. Wagh! they cudn't a see me—thet they cudn't, ef every nigger o' 'em hed the eyes o' an Argoose—thet they cudn't, Billee."

"How?" I inquired. "Do you mean to say that it is possible for any one to appoach yonder camp without being observed? Is that what you mean, Rube?"

"That ur preezactly what I mean, young fellur; no, not adzactly thet, eyther. One o' *you* I didn't say. What I said wur thet this hyur trapper, Rube Rawlins o' the Rocky Mountains, kud slide inter yander campmint jest like greased lightnin' through a gooseberry-bush, 'ithout e'er an Injun seein' 'im; and thet too ef the red skinned varmints hed more eyes in thur heads than they hev lice; which, accordin' to this child's recknin', ud give ivery squaw's son o' the gang as miny peepers as thur ur spots in a peacock's tail, an' a wheen over to breed, I kalkerlate. No plan to git inter thur camp 'ithout bein' seed! Wagh! yur gettin' green, Bill Garey."

"How can it be accomplished, Rube? Pray explain. You know how impatient"——

"Don't git impayshent, young fellur! thet ur's no use whetsomdever. Yu'll need payshinse, an' a good grist o' thet ur, afore ye kin warm yur shins at yander fires; but ee kin do it, an' in the nick o' time too, ef yu'll go preezactly accordin' to what ole Rube tells ye, an' keep yur eye well skinned, an' yur teeth from chatterin'—I knows yu'll do all thet. I knows yur weasel to the back o' yur neck, an' kin whip yur weight in wildcats any day i' the year. Now, d'yur agree to follur my dereckshuns?"

"I promise faithfully to act according to your advice."

"Thet ur sensible sayed—durnation'd sensible. Wal, then, I'll gi' ye my device."

As Rube said this, he moved forward to the edge of the timber, making a sign for Garey and myself to follow.

On reaching its outer edge, but still within cover, he dropped down upon his knees, behind some evergreen bushes.

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I imitated his example, and kneeling upon his right, while Garey crouched down on the left.

Our eyes were directed upon the Indian camp, of which, and the plain around it, we had a good view—as good as could be obtained under the light of a too brilliant moon.

After we had surveyed the scene for some moments in silence the old trapper condescended to begin the conversation.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE TRAPPER'S COUNSEL.

"Now Bill Garey, an' you young fellur, jest clap yer eyes on thet ere campmint, an' see ef thur aint a road leadin' inter the very heart o' it, strait as the tail o' a skeert fox—'ee see it? eh?"

"Not under kiver?" replied Garey, interrogatively.

"Under kiver—every step o' the way—the best o' kiver."

Garey and I once more scrutinized the whole circumference of the encampment, and the ground adjacent. We could perceive no cover by which the camp could be approached. Surely there was none.

What could Rube mean? Were there clouds in the sky? Had he perceived some portent of coming darkness? Had his words reference to this?

I raised my eyes, and swept the whole canopy with inquiring glances Up to the zenith, around the horizon, east, west, north, and south, I looked for clouds, but looked in vain. A few light cirri floated high in the atmosphere, but these, even when crossing the moon's disc, cast no perceptible shadow. On the contrary, they were tokens of settled weather, and moving slowly, almost fixed upon the face of the heavens, were evidence that no sudden change might be expected. When the trapper

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talked of entering the camp under cover, he could not have meant under cover of darkness. What then?

"Don't see any kiver, old hoss?" said Garey, after a pause; 'neyther bush nor weed."

"Bush!" echoed Rube, "who's talking about weeds and bushes? There's other ways o' hidin' yur karkidge 'sides stickin' it in a bush or under a weed. Your a gettin' durnation'd pumpkin-headed, Bill Garey. I 'gin to think yur in the same perdicament as the young fellur hisself. You've been a humbuggin' wi' one o' them ur Mexican Moochachers."

"No, Rube, no."

"Durn me ef I don't bleeve you hev, boy. I heern ye tell one o' 'em"——

"What?"

"Wagh! ye know well enough. Didn't 'ee tell one o' thur gurls at the rancherie that ye loved her as hard as a mule kud kick—sartintly ye did; them wur your preezact words, Billie."

"I was only jokin', hoss."

"Pretty jokin' that will be, when I gits back to Bent's fort, an' tell yur Coco squaw—he—he—he—ho—ho—ho! Gee hosophat! thur *will* be a rumpus."

"Nonsense, Rube, thar's nothen ov it."

"Thar must a be—yur brain pan's out o' order—Bill, ye haint hed a clur idee for nine days back. Bushes and weeds too. Wagh! Who sayed thur wur bushes. Whar's yur eyes? d'ye see a bank?"

"A bank?" echoed Garey and I, simultaneously.

"Ye-es," drawled Rube, "a bank. I guess there's a bank right afore yur noses, ef both o' you aint as blind as the kittens o' a possum. Now, do 'ee see it?"

Neither of us made reply to the final interrogatory. For the first time, we began to comprehend Rube's meaning, and our eyes as well as thoughts were suddenly directed upon the object indicated by his words—the bank of the stream—for to this he referred.

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I have stated that the little river ran close to the Indian lines, and on one side formed the boundary of the camp.

We could tell that the current was towards us; for the stream, on reaching the hill upon which we were, turned sharply off and swept round its base. The Indian camp was on the left bank, though upon its right, when viewed up stream, as we were regarding it. Any one proceeding up the left bank must, therefore, necessarily pass within the lines, and through among the horses that were staked nearest to the water.

It need not be supposed that under our new scrutiny the stream had hitherto escaped observation. I myself had long ago thought of it, as a means of covering my approach. Time after time had my eyes dwelt upon it, but without result. In its channel I could perceive no shelter from observation. Its banks were low, and without either rush or bush upon them The green turf of the prairie stretched up to the very brink and scarce twelve inches below its level was the surface of the current. This was especially the case along the front of the encampment, and for some distance above and below

Any one endeavoring to enter the camp by stealing up the channel, must have gone completely under the water—for ever a swimmer could have been observed upon its surface. Or even if a man could have approached in this way, there was no hope that a horse could be taken near, and without the horse, what prospect of ultimate escape?

It had seemed to me impossible. More than once had I taken into consideration, and as often rejected the idea. Not so Rube. It was the very scheme he had conceived, and he now proceeded to point out its practicability.

"Now, then, 'ee see a bank, do 'ee?"

"Taint much o' a bank," replied Garey, rather discouragingly

"No—taint as high as Missoora Bluffs, nor the blluffs o Snake River—that nob'dy durnies—but ef taint as high as it mout be, it ur ivery minnit a-gettin higher, I reck'n."

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"Getting higher, you say?"

"Ye-es, or what ur putty consid'able the same thing, the tother ur a gettin' lower."

"The water, you mean?"

"The water ur a fallin'—gwine down by inches at a jump an in a hour from this, thur'll be bluffs in front o' the camp, half a yard high—thet's what thur'll be."

"And you think I could get into the camp by creeping under there?"

"Sure o't; whet's to hinner ye?—it ur as easy as fallin' off a log."

"But the horse—how could I bring him near?"

"Jest the same way as yurself. I tell yur, the bed o' that river ur deep enuf to hide the biggest hoss in creeashun. 'T ur now full for the reezun there's been a fresh in consykwince o' last night's rain; 'ee needn't mind thet—the hoss kin wade or swim eythur, an' the bank 'll kiver 'im from the eyes o' the Injuns. You kin leave him in the river."

"In the water?"

"In coorse—yur hoss 'll stand thur—an' ef he don't, you kin tie his nose to the bank. You kin take 'im as near as you please, but don't go too far to wind'rd, else them mustangs 'll smell 'im, and then it ur all up both wi' yurself an' yur hoss. About two hundred yurds 'll be yur likliest distance. Ef yur git the gurl clur ye kin easy run that, I reckin; jest start for the hoss, an' when yur mounted, gallip like durnation up hyur for the timmer, whur we'll be cachéd, an' then, durned ef the red skins don't git goss out o' our rifles—wagh! thet's the way tur do the thing—it ur."

Certainly the plan appeared practicable enough. The sinking of the water was a new element. It had escaped my observation, though Rube had noted it. It was this that had delayed him so long in giving his opinion. He had been watching it while leaning upon his rifle, though none of the rest of us had

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thought of such a thing. He remembered the heavy rain of the night before. He saw that it had caused a freshet in the little river, that its subsidence had begun, and as in most prairie streams, it was progressing with rapidity. His keen eye had detected a fall of several inches during the half hour we had been upon the ground. I could myself observe, now that the thing was pointed out to me that the banks were *higher* than before.

Certainly the plan of approaching by the stream had assumed a more feasible aspect. If the channel should prove deep enough, I might get the horse sufficiently near—the rest would have to be left to stratagem and chance.

"Yur ridin' in the Injun hoss," said Rube, "would never do—it mout on the worst pinch, an' ef ye don't git in the tother way, you kin still try it, but you cu'd niver git acrosst through the picket; them mustangs 'ud be sure to raise sich a snortin' and stompin', an' whigerin' as 'ud bring the hul campment about ye, and some o' the sharp eyed niggurs 'ud be sartin to find out yur hide wur white. Tother way ur fur the safest—it ur."

I was not long in making up my mind. Rube's counsel at once decided me, and I resolved to act accordingly.

CHAPTER XC.

TAKING TO THE WATER.

I SPENT but little time in preparations. These had been made already.

It remained only to tighten my saddle girth, look to the caps of my revolvers, and place both pistols and knife in the belt behind my back. There the weapons would be concealed by the pendent robe of the jaguar skins. In a few minutes I was ready

I still loitered awhile, to wait for the falling of the water

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Not long—I was too anxious to tarry long. The hour of the council might be come—I might be too late for the crisis. Not long did I loiter.

It was not necessary. Even by the moonlight we could distinguish the dark line of the bank separating the grassy turf from the surface of the water. The rippling current was shining like silver-lace, and by contrast, the dark earthy stripe that rose vertically above it, could be observed more distinctly. It was sensibly broader.

I could wait no longer. I leaped into the saddle. My comrades crowded around me to say a parting word. With a wish or a prayer upon their lips, one after another pressed my hand. Some doubted of their ever seeing me again—I could tell this from the tone of their leave-taking; others were more confident. All vowed to revenge me if I fell.

Rube and Garey went with me down the hill. At the point where the stream infringed upon it there were bushes. These continued up the declivity, and joined the timber upon the summit. Under their cover we had descended, reaching the bank just at the salient angle of the bend. A thin skirting of similar bushes ran around the base of the hill, and following the path by which we had come, the ambuscade might have been moved a little nearer to the camp. But the cover was not so good as the grove upon the summit, and in case of a retreat, it would be necessary to gallop up the naked face of the slope, and thus expose our numbers. It was decided, therefore, to leave the men where they were.

From the bend to the Indian camp the river trended almost in straight line, and its long reach lay before my eyes like a band of shining metal. Along its bank the bush extended no further. A single step towards the camp would have exposed me to the view of its occupants.

At this point, therefore, it was necessary for me to take the water, and dismounting, I made ready for the immersion.

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The trappers had spoken their last words of instruction and counsel. They had both grasped my hand, giving it a significant squeeze that promised more than words: but to these too had they given utterance.

"Don't be afeard, capt'n" said the younger; "Rube and I won't be far off. If we hear your pistols, we'll make a rush tor'st you, and meet you half way anyhow; and if anything should happen amiss"—here Garey spoke with emphasis—"you may depend on't, we'll take a bloody revenge."

"Ye-es," echoed Rube, "we'll do jest thet—thur'll be many a nick in Targuts afore next Krissmuss, ef *you* ur rubbed out, young fellur—that I swear to ye—but don't be skeeart! Keep yur eyes sharp skinned, an' your claws steady, an' thur's no feer but you'll get clur—oncest yur clur o' the camp, 'ee may reckon on us—but start for the timmer, an' gallop as ef ole scratch wur a gruppin at the tail o' yur critter"

I waited to hear no more, but leading Moro down the bank at a place where it sloped, I stepped gently into the current. My well-trained steed followed without hesitation, and in another instant we were both breast deep in the flood. The water was just the depth I desired. There was a half yard of bank that rose vertically above the surface, and this was sufficient to shelter either my own head as I stood erect, or the frontlet of my horse. Should the channel continue of uniform depth as far as the camp, the approach would be easy indeed, and, for certain hydrographic reasons, I was in hopes it would

The plumes of the Indian bonnet rose above the level of the meadow turf; and as these feathers, dyed of gay colors, would have formed a conspicuous object, I took off the gaudy head-dress and carried it in my hand. I also raised the robe of jaguar skin over my shoulders, in order to keep it dry, and for the same reason I temporarily carried my pistols above the water-line

The making of these slight alterations occupied only a minute or so, and as soon as they were completed, I moved forward

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through the water. The very depth of the stream proved a circumstance in my favor. In wading, both horse and man make less noise in deep than in shallow water, and this was an important consideration. The night was still—too still for my wishes—and the plunging sound would have been heard afar off, but fortunately, there were rapids below, just where the stream forced its way through the spur of the hill, and the hissing sough there, louder in the still night, was borne upon the air to the distance of many miles. Their noise to my own ears almost drowned the plashing made by Moro and myself. I had noted this *point d'avantage* before embarking upon the enterprize.

At the distance of two hundred yards from the bushes, I paused to look back. My purpose was to fix in my memory the direction of the hill, and more especially the point where my comrades had been left in ambush. In the event of a close pursuit, it would not do to mistake their exact situation.

I easily made out the place, and saw that, for several reasons, a better could not have been chosen. The trees that timbered the crest of the hill were of a peculiar kind, more so upon the face of the earth. They were a species of arborescent yucca, then unknown to botanists. Many of them were forty feet in height, and their thick angular branches and terminal fascicles of rigid leaves, outlined against the sky, formed a singular, almost an unearthly spectacle. It was unlike any other vegetation upon earth, more resembling a grove of cast iron than a wood of exogenous trees.

Why I regarded the spot as favorable for an ambush, was chiefly this: a party approaching it from the plain, and climbing the hill, might fancy a host of enemies in their front, for the trees themselves, with their heads of radiating blades, bore a striking resemblance to an array of plumed gigantic warriors. Many of the yuccas were only six feet in height, with tufted heads and branchless trunks as gross as the body of a man, and these might readily have been mistaken for human beings.

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I saw at a glance the advantage of the position, should the Indians pursue me, and I could succeed in reaching the timber before them. A volley from my comrades would check the pursuers, however numerous. The nine rifles would be enough, with a few shots from the revolvers. The savages would fancy nine hundred under the mystifying shadows of that spectral-like grove.

With confidence, strengthened by these considerations, I once more turned my face up stream, and breasting the current, kept on

CHAPTER XCI.

UP STREAM.

My advance was far from being rapid. The water was occasionally deeper or shallower, but generally rising above my hips, deep enough to render wading a task of time and strength. The current was of course against me, and though not very swift, seriously impeded my progress. I could have advanced more rapidly, but for the necessity of keeping my head and that of my horse below the escarpment of the bank. At times it was a close fit, with scarce an inch to spare, and in several places I was compelled to move with my back bent, and my horse's nose was held down to the surface of the water.

At intervals I paused to rest myself, for the exertion of wading against the current wearied me, and took away my breath. Thi was particularly the case when I was required to crouch, but I chose my resting-place where the channel was deepest, and where I could stand erect.

I was all the time anxious to look up and take a survey of the camp. I wished to ascertain its distance and position ; but I dared not raise my head above the level of the bank. The

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sward that covered it was smooth as a mown meadow, and the edge line of the turf even and unbroken. Had I shown but my hand above it, it might have been seen in the clear white light. I dared not show either the hand or head.

I had advanced I know not how far, but I fancied I must be near the lines. All the way I had kept close under the left bank, which, as Rube had predicted, now rose a full half yard above the water's line. This was a favorable circumstance, and another equally so was the fact that the moon on that—the eastern side—was yet low in the sky, and consequently the bank flung a broad black shadow that extended nearly half way across the stream. In this shadow I walked; and its friendly darkness sheltered both myself and my horse.

I fancied I must be near the lines, and longed to reconnoitre them, but for the reason already given, dare not.

I was equally afraid to make any further advance; for that would be still more perilous. I had already noted the direction of the wind. It blew *from* the river, and *towards* the camp; and should I bring my horse opposite the line of the mustangs, I would then be directly to windward of them, and in danger from their keen nostril. They would be almost certain to take up the scent of my steed, and utter their warning snorts. The breeze was light, but so much the worse. There was sufficient to convey the smell, and not enough to drown the plunging noise necessarily made by my horse moving through the water, with the hollow pounding of his hoofs upon the rocks at the bottom.

If I raised my head over the bank, there was the danger of being observed; if I advanced, the prospect was one of still greater peril.

For some moments I stood hesitating—uncertain as to whether I should leave my horse, or lead him a little further. I heard noises from the camp, but they were not distinct enough to guide.

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I looked back down the river with the hope of being able to calculate the distance I had come, and by that means decide where I was. But my observations furnished no data by which I could determine my position. With my eyes almost on a level with the surface of the water, I could not judge satisfactorily of distance.

I turned my face up-stream and again, scrutinized the parapet line of the bank. Just then I saw an object over the edge, that answered well to guide me. It was the croup and hip bones of a horse—one of the mustangs staked near the bank. I saw neither the head nor shoulders of the animal. Its hind quarters were towards the stream. Its head was to the grass—it was browsing

The sight gratified me: the mustang was full two hundred yards above the point I had reached. I knew that its position marked the outer line of the encampment. I was just in the place where I wanted to be—about two hundred yards from their lines—just at the distance I desired to leave my horse.

I had taken the precaution to bring with me my picket pin—one of the essentials of the prairie traveller. It was the work of a moment to delve it into the bank. I needed not to drive it with violence: my well-trained steed never broke fastening, however slight. With him the stake was only a sign that he was not free to wander.

In a moment he was staked; and with a "whisper" I parted from him; and kept on up-stream.

I had not gone a dozen yards further, when I perceived a break in the line of the bank. It was a little "gulley," that led lanting from the level of the prairie down to the bed of the stream. Its counterpart I perceived on the opposite side. The two indicated a ford or crossing, used by buffaloes, wild horses, and other denizens of the prairie.

At first I viewed it with apprehension. I feared it might uncover my body to the eyes of the enemy, but on coming opposite

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my fears were allayed. The slope was abrupt, and the high ground screened me as before. There would be no danger in passing the place.

As I was about moving on, an idea arrested me; and I paused to regard the gulley with a look of greater interest. It offered me an advantage.

I had been troubled about the position in which I had left my horse. Should I succeed in getting back, of course it would be under the pressure of hot pursuit, and my steed was not conveniently placed. His back was below the level of the bank. He might easily be mounted, but how got out of the bed of the stream. Only by a desperate leap might he reach the plain above, and he might fail in the effort—time might be lost, when time and speed would be most wanted.

I had been troubled with this thought. It need trouble me no longer. The "crossing" afforded easy access either to or from the channel of the river—the very thing I wanted.

I was not slow to profit by the discovery. I turned back, and having released the rein, led my horse gently up to the break.

Choosing a spot under the highest part of the bank, I fastened him as before, and there left him.

I now moved with more ease and confidence, but with increased caution. I was getting too near to risk making the slightest noise in the water. A single plash might betray me.

It was my intention to keep in the channel until I had passed the point where the horses were staked. By so doing I should avoid crossing the line of the horse-guards, and what was quite as important, that of the horses themselves, for I was equally apprehensive of being discovered by the latter. Once inside their circle, they would take no notice of me, for, doubtless, there would be other Indians within sight, and I trusted to my well counterfeited semblance of savagery to deceive the eyes of the equine sentinels.

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I did not wish to go far beyond their line. That would bring me in front of the camp itself, too near its fires and its idle groups.

I had noticed before starting, that there was a broad belt between the place occupied by the men, and that where their horses were staked. This "neutral" ground was little used by the camp-loungers, and somewhere on the edge of it I was desirous of making my *entrée*.

I succeeded to my utmost wishes. Closely hugging the bank, I passed the browsing mustangs; under their very noses I glided past, for I could hear them munching the herbage right over me, but so silently did I steal along, that neither snort nor hoof-stroke heralded my advance.

In a few minutes I was sufficiently beyond them to make a halt. I raised my head—slowly and gently I raised it—till my eyes were above the level of the prairie slope. No one was near. I could see the swarth savages grouped around their fires, but they were an hundred yards off, or more. They were capering and talking and laughing; but no ear was bent, and no eye seemed turned towards me. No one was near.

I grasped the bank with my hands, and drew myself out. Slowly and silently I ascended, like some demon from the dark trap-door of a stage, on my knees I reached the level of the turf, and then gently rising to my feet, I stood erect within the limits of the Indian camp, to all appearance as complete a savage as any upon the ground!

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CHAPTER XCII.

COUP D'ŒIL OF THE CAMP.

For some minutes I stood motionless as a statue. I stirred neither hand nor foot, lest the movement should cat.h the eye, either of the horse-guards or those moving around the fires. I had already donned by plumed head-dress before climbing out of the channel. My first thought was to replace my pistols in the belt behind my back. The movement was stealthily made; and with like stealthy action, I suffered the mantle of jaguar-skins to drop from my shoulders, and hang to its full length. I had saved the robe from getting wet, and its ample skirt now served me in concealing my soaked breech-cloth, as well as the upper half of my leggings. These and the moccasins were, of course, saturated with water, but I had not much uneasiness about that. In a prairie camp, and upon the banks of a deep stream, an Indian with wet leggings could not be a spectacle to excite suspicion. There would be many reasons why my counterpart might choose to immerse his copper-colored extremities in the river. Moreover, the buckskin, dressed Indian-fashion, was speedily casting the water; it would soon drip dry, or, even if wet, would scarce be observed under such a light.

The spot where I had "landed," chanced to be one of the least conspicuous in the whole area of the camp. I was just between two lights—the red glare of the camp-fires and the mellower beams of the moon; and the atmospheric confusion occasioned by the meeting of the distinct kinds of light favored me, by producing a species of optical illusion. It was but slight, and I could easily be seen from the centre of the camp, but not with sufficient distinctness for my disguise to be penetrated by

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any one. Therefore, it was hardly probable that any of the savages would approach, or trouble their heads about me. I might pass for one of themselves indulging in a solitary saunter yielding himself to a moment of abstraction or melancholy. I was well enough acquainted with Indian life to know that there was nothing *outre* or unlikely in this behavior. Such conduct was perfectly *en régle*.

I did not remain long on that spot—only long enough to catch the salient features of the scene. I saw there were many fires, and around each was grouped a number of human forms—some squatted, some standing. The night was cold enough to make them draw near to the burning logs, and for this reason but few were wandering about—a fortunate circumstance for me.

There was one fire larger than the rest. From its dimensions it might be termed a bonfire, such as is made by the flattering and flunkeyish peasanty of Old World lands when they welcome home the squire and the count. It was placed directly in front of the solitary tent, and not a dozen paces from its entrance. Its blazing pile gave forth a flood of red light that reached even to the spot where I stood, and flickered in my face. I even fancied I could feel its warmth upon my cheeks.

Around this fire were many forms of men, all of them standing up. I could see the faces of those who were upon its farther side, but only the figures of those on the nearer. The former I could see with almost as much distinctness as if I had been close beside them. I could trace the lineaments of their features—the painted devices on their breasts and faces—the style of their habiliments.

The sight of these last somewhat astonished me. I had expected to see red-skinned warriors, in leggings, moccasins and breech-cloth—with heads naked or plumed, and shoulders draped under brown robes of buffalo-skin. Some such there were, but not all of them were so costumed. On the contrary, I beheld savages shrouded in serapes and cloaks of broadcloth,

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with calzoneros on their legs, and upon their heads huge hats of black glaze—regular Mexican sombreros! In short, I beheld numbers of them in full Mexican costume!

Others again were dressed somewhat in a military fashion, with helmets or stiff shakos, ill-fitting uniform coats of red or blue cloth, oddly contrasting with the brown buckskin that covered their legs and feet.

With some astonishment I beheld these "fancy dresses," but my surprise passed away when I reflected as to who were the men before me, and whence they had lately come—where they had been, and on what errand. It was no travesty, but a scene of actual life. The savages were clad in the spoils they had captured from civilization.

I need not have been at such pains with my toilette. Under any guise I could scarce have looked odd in the midst of such a motley crew. Even my own uniform might have passed muster—all except the color of my skin.

Fortunately, a few of the band still preserved their native costume—a few appeared in full paint and plumes, else I should have been *too Indian* for such a company!

It cost not a minute to note these peculiarities, nor did I stay to observe them minutely. My eyes were in search of Isolina

I cast inquiring glances on all sides. I scrutinized the groups around the different fires. I saw other women, whom I knew to be captives, but I saw not her.

I scanned their forms, and the faces of those who were turned towards me. A glance would have been enough. I could easily have recognized her face under the fire light—under any light. It was not before me.

"In the tent—in the tent. She must be there."

I hastened to move away from the spot where I had hitherto been standing. My eye, quickened by the necessity of action, had fallen upon the copse that covered the entire background of

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the camp. At a glance I detected the advantage offered by its shadowy cover.

The tent was placed close to the edge of the timber; and in front of the tent, as already stated, was the great fire. Plainly, this was the gravitating point—the centre of motive and motion.

If aught of interest was to be enacted, there would lie the scene. In the lodge, or near it, would she be found. Certainly she must be there; and there I resolved to seek her.

CHAPTER XCIII.

A FRIENDLY ENCOUNTER.

Just then the shrill voice of a crier pealed through the camp, and I observed an unusual movement. I could not make out what the man said, but the peculiar intonation told that he was uttering some signal or summons. Something of interest was about to transpire.

The Indians now commenced circling around the blazing pile, meeting and passing each other, as if threading the mazes of some silent, and solemn dance. Others were seen hastening from distant parts of the camp, as if to observe the actions of those around the fire; or join with them in the movement.

I did not wait to watch them. Their attention thus occupied gave me an opportunity of reaching the copse unobserved, and without further ado, I started towards it.

I walked slowly, and with an assumed air of careless indifference. I counterfeited the Comanche walk—not that bold, free port, the magnificent and inimitable stride, so characteristic of Chippewa and Shawano, Huron, and Iraquois—but the shuffling, gingery step of an English jockey, for such in reality is the gait of the Comanche Indian, when a-foot.

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I must have played my part well. A savage crossing from the horse-guards towards the great fire passed near me, and hailed me by name.

"*Wakono!*" cried he.

"*Que cosa?* Well—what matter?" I replied in Spanish, imitating as well as I could the Indian voice and accent. It was a venture, but I was taken at a short, and could not well remain silent.

The man appeared some little surprised at being addressed in the language of Mexico. Nevertheless, he understood it, and made rejoinder.

"You hear the summons, Wakono? Why do you not come forward? The council meets. Hissooroyo is already there."

I understood what was said, more from the Indian's gestures than his speech, though the words "summons," "council," and the name "Hissooroyo" helped me to comprehend his meaning I chanced to know the Comanche epithet for the two first, and also that Hissooroyo (the Spanish wolf) was the Indian appellation of the Mexican renegade.

Though I understood what was said, I was not prepared with a reply. I dared not risk the answer in Spanish, for I knew not the extent of Wakono's proficiency in the Andalusian tongue.

I felt myself in a dilemma, and the importunate savage—no doubt some friend of Wakono himself—appeared determined to stick to me. How was I to get rid of him?

A happy idea came to my relief. Assuming an air of extreme dignity, and as though I did not wish to be disturbed in my meditations, I raised my hand and waved the man a parting salute. At the same time, I turned my head and walked slowly away.

The Indian accepted the *congè*, and moved off, but evidently with an air of reluctance. As I glanced back over my shoulder, I could see him starting from the spot with a hesitating step,

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no doubt somewhat astonished at the strange behavior of his friend Wakono.

I did not look back again, until I had placed myself under the shadow of the timber. Then I turned to reconnoitre. My friend had continued on to the fire. I saw him just entering among the crowd that circled around the great fire.

Screened from observation by the shadow, I could now pause and reflect. The trifling incident that had caused me some apprehension, had also helped me to some useful knowledge. First, I learned my own name. Second, that there was a council about to take place—and thirdly, that the renegade, Hissooroyo, had something to do with this council.

This was knowledge of importance; combined with my previous information, everything was now made clear. This council could be no other than the jury-trial between the renegade and the yet nameless chief; the same that was to decide to which belonged the right of property in my betrothed.

It was about to meet—it had not assembled as yet. Then had I arrived in time; neither white savage or red savage had yet come into possession—neither had dared to lay hands on the coveted and priceless gem.

Isolina was still safe—thus singularly preserved from brutal contact These dogs in the manger, their mutual jealousy, had proved her protection! I was consoled by the thought—strange source of consolation!

I was in time, but where was she? From my new position, I had a still better view of the camp, its fires, and its denizens -- she was nowhere to be seen!

In the lodge then—she must certainly be there—or—a new thought occurred to me—she may be kept apart from the other captives?—in the copse—she may be concealed in the copse until the sentence be pronounced?

This last conjecture brought along with it hopes and resolves. I determined to search the copse. If I should find her there

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my emprise would be easy indeed; at all events, easier than I had anticipated. Though guarded by the savages, I should rescue her from their grasp. The lives of six men—perhaps twice that number—were under my belt. The odds of unarmed numbers would be nothing against the deadly bullets of my revolvers, and I saw that most of the savages had laid aside their weapons, confident in the security of their camp.

But I might find her alone, or perhaps with a single jailor. The meeting of the council favored the supposition. The men would all be there—some to take part, others interested in the result, or merely from curiosity to watch the proceedings Yes, all of them would have an interest in the issue—too surely all. The barbarous custom of these savage brutes at that moment came to my remembrance.

I stayed no longer to reflect, but gliding into the grove, commenced my search for the captive.

The ground was favorable to my progress. There was not much underwood, and the trees grew thinly. I could easily pass amongst them without the necessity of crouching, and without making noise. The silent tread of the moccasin was in my favor, as also the dark foliage that stretched overhead, hiding the sky from my view.

The chief timber of the copse was the pecan-hickory—almost an evergreen—and the trees were still in full leaf, only here and there, where the trunks stood far apart, did the moonbeams strike through the thick foliage.

The surface of the ground was shrouded from her light, and the narrow aisles through which I passed were as dark as if no moon had been shining.

There was still light enough to reveal some horrid scenes. O Heavens! my heart bleeds at the remembrance.

I was wrong in my conjecture. The men had not all gone to the council; the captive women were not all by the campfires. I beheld passion in its most brutal form—red ruffians

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lolling in the bush beside their helpless victims—women—fair, white women, with drooping heads and listless air, wounded, dishevelled, weeping! O Heaven! My heart recoils at the remembrance!

It recoiled at the sight—it burned with indignation. At every turn did it prompt me to draw knife or pistol. At every step my fingers itched to immolate a hideous paint-besmeared brute—to slay a "noble" savage.

I was restrained only by my own desperate situation—by my apprehensions for the safety of Isolina—now more acute than ever. What horrid imaginings crowded into my brain—begot by the barbarous drama that was being enacted around me, shamelessly before my face—under my very eyes.

The monsters too earnestly occupied with their coarse caresses, took no heed of me; and I passed on without remark or interruption.

I threaded the pathways of the grove one after another, gliding through as rapidly as the path would permit. I entered every aisle and glade. I searched everywhere, even to the farthest limits of the woods. I saw more men—more weeping women—more red ruffianism. I saw naught of her for whom I searched.

"In the tent, then—she must be there."

I turned my face towards the lodge, and moving with stealthy step, soon arrived among the trees that stood in the rear. I halted near the edge, and separating the leaves with my hands peered cautiously through. I had no need to search farther Isolina was before my eyes.

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CHAPTER XCIV.

A SPY IN THE COUNCIL.

Yes, there was my betrothed—within sight, within hearing almost within reach of my hands; and I dared not touch, I dared not speak, I scarce dared look upon her. My fingers trembled among the leaves; my heart rose and fell; I could feel within my breast its strokes rapid and irregular; I could hear its sonorous vibration.

It was not at the first glance I saw Isolina. On looking through the leaves the *coup d'œil* was a scene that quite astonished me, and for a while occupied my attention. Since I had last gazed upon the great fire, the grouping around it had undergone an entire change. A new tableau was presented, that for the moment held me under a spell of surprise.

The fire no longer blazed, or only slightly and when stirred. The logs had burned into coals, and now yielded a fainter light, but one more red and garish. It was steady nevertheless, and the position of the pile rendered it strong enough to illumine the camp around to its utmost limits.

The fire was still encircled by savages, but no longer standing nor grouped irregularly, as I had before observed them On the contrary, they were seated, or rather squatted, at equal distances from each other, and forming a ring that girdled the huge mound of embers.

There were about twenty of these men—I did not count

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them—but I observed that all were in their native costume—leggings, and breech-cloth to the waist, nothing above, save the armlets and shell ornaments of the nose, ears and neck. All were profusely painted with chalk, ochre and vermilion. Beond doubt I was looking upon the "council."

The other Indians—they in "fancy dresses"—were still upon the ground, but they stood behind, retired a pace or two from the circle, in groups of two, three or four, talking in low mutterings. Others were moving about, still at a greater distance from the fire.

My observation of all these features of the scene, did not occupy ten seconds of time—just so long as my eyes were getting accustomed to the light. At the end of that interval my glance rested upon Isolina, and there became fixed.

In the chain of Indians that encircled the fire there was a break—an interval of ten or a dozen feet. It was directly in front of the lodge, and *above* the fire—for the ground gently sloped from the tent towards the stream. In this spot the captive was seated. Her position was exactly between the lodge and the fire, and a little retired behind the circle of the council. The tent intervening between her and my position had prevented me from seeing her at first.

She was half-seated, half-reclining upon a robe of wolf skins. I saw that her arms were free. I saw that her limbs were bound. Her back was to the tent—her face turned towards the council I could not see it.

To recognize my betrothed, I did not need to look upon her face. Her matchless form, outlined against the red embers, was easily identified. The full round curve of the neck; the oval ines of the head; the majestic sweep of the shoulders; the arms smooth and symmetrical; all these were familiar to my eyes, for oft had they dwelt on them in admiration. I could not be mistaken. The form before me was that graven upon my heart; it was Isolina's.

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There was another salient point in this singular tableau, that would not escape observation. Beyond the fire, and directly opposite to where Isolina was placed, I saw another well-known object—the white steed! He was not staked there, but haltered and held in hand by one of the Indians. He must have been lately brought upon the ground; for, from neither of my former points of observation, had I noted him. He, like his mistress, was to be put on trial—his ownership was also matter of dispute.

There was in sight one more object that interested me. Not with friendly interest did I regard it, but with disgust and indignation.

Not seated in the council-ring, not standing among the idle groups, but apart from all, I beheld Hissoo-rozo, the renegade. Savage as were the red warriors, fiend-like as they appeared with their paint-smeared visages, not one looked so savage or fiend-like as he.

The features of this man were naturally bad; but the paint—for he had adopted this with every other vile custom of barbarian life—rendered their expression positively ferocious. The device upon his forehead was a death's head and cross-bones, done in white chalk, and upon this appeared the well imitated semblance of a bleedng scalp—the appropriate symbols of a cruel disposition.

There was something unnatural in a white skin thus disfigured—for the natural complexion was not hidden. Here and there it could be perceived forming the ground of the motley elaboration—its pallid hue in strange contrast with the deeper colors that daubed it. It was not the canvas for such a picture.

Yet there the picture was in red and yellow, black, white and blue; there stood the deep-dyed villain.

I saw not his rival. I looked for him, but saw him not. Perhaps he was one of those who stood around. Perhaps he had not yet come up. He was the son of the great chief—per-

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naps he was inside the lodge. The last was the most probable conjecture.

The great calumet was brought forward, and lit by the fire It was passed around the circle, from mouth to mouth, each savage satisfying himself with a single draw from the tube. I knew that this was the inauguration of the council. The tria was about to proceed.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE COUNCIL IN SESSION.

The situation into which I had chanced, could not have been better had I deliberately chosen it. I had under my eyes the council-fire and council, the group around—in short, the whole area of the camp.

What was of equal importance, I could see without being seen. Along the edge of the copse there extended a narrow belt of the shadow, similar to that which had favored me while in the channel, and produced by a like cause, for the stream and the selvedge of the grove were parallel to each other. The moonbeams fell obliquely upon the grove, and under the thick foliage of the pecans I was well screened from her light behind, while the lodge covered me from the glare of the fire in front

I could not have been better placed for my purpose. I saw the advantage of the position, and resolved, therefore, to abide upon it.

The observations and reflections thus given in detail occupied me but a few minutes of time. Thought is quick, and at that crisis mine was more than usually on the alert. Almost instantaneously did I perceive the points that most interested me, or had reference to my plans—almost instantaneously I had

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mastered the situation, and I next bent my mind upon how to take advantage of it.

I saw there was but one way to proceed—my original scheme must be carried out; under so many eyes, there was not the slightest chance that the captive could be stolen away—she must be taken openly, and by a bold stroke. Of this was I convinced.

The question arose, when should I make the attempt? At that moment? She was not ten paces from where I stood! Could I rush forward, and with my knife set free her limbs? Might we then get off before the savages could fling themselves upon us?

Hopeless—impossible. She was too near them—she was too near the renegade who claimed her as his property. He was standing almost over her—within the distance of a single leap In his belt was the long triangular blade, the Spanish knife He could cut me down ere I could have severed a cord of her fastenings. The attempt would fail. Success was hopeless—impossible. I must wait for a better opportunity, and I waited.

I remembered Rube's last word of counsel, not to act too hastily; and his reasons, that if I must make a "desprit strike fur it," to leave the grand *coup* to the last moment. The circumstances could be no worse then than now.

Under the influence of this idea I checked my impatience, and waited.

I watched Hissoo-rozo—I watched the squatted forms around the fire—I watched straggling groups behind them--in turns my eyes wandered from one to the other.

At intervals they rested upon Isolina.

Up to this moment, I had not seen her countenance. I saw only the reverse of that beautiful image so deeply graven upon my heart. But even then, under that suspence of peril, strange thoughts were passing within me. I felt a singular longing to look upon her face. I remembered the *herrelero.*

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It pleased fortune to smile upon me. So many little incidents were occurring in my favor, that I began to believe the fates propitious, and my hopes of success were growing stronger apace. Just then, the captive turned her head, and her face was towards me.

There was no mark on that fair brow—that soft cheek was without a scar—the delicate skin was intact, smooth and diaphanous as ever. The herredero had been merciful!

Perhaps something had occurred to interrupt or hinder him from his horrid work? Would that the matador had met with a similar interruption! I could not tell—those profuse clusters covered all—neck, bosom and shoulders were hidden under the dark dishevelment.

I could not tell, but I did not dare to hope. Cyprio had seen the blood! It was but a momentary glance, and her face was again turned away. At intervals she repeated it, and I saw that she looked in other directions. I could note the uneasiness of her manner. I could tell why those glances were given. I knew her design. Oh, for one word in her hearing—one whisper!

It might not be—she was too closely watched. Jealous eyes were upon her—savage hearts were gloating over her beauty No word could have reached her that would not have been heard by others—by all around the fire—for the silence was profound. The "council" had not yet essayed to speak.

The stillness was at length broken by the voice of a crier, who in a shrill tone proclaimed that the "council was in session."

There was something so ceremonious in the whole proceedings, and every movement was made with such regularity, that but for the open air, the fire, the wild savage costumes and fierce painted faces, I might have fancied myself in the presence of a civilized court, and witnessing a trial by jury. It was, in effect, just such a trial, though judge there was none. The members of the jury were themselves the judges, for in the simplicity of

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such primitive litigation, each was presumed to understand the law without an interpreter. Pleaders, too, were equally absent. Each party—plaintiff and defendant—was expected to plead his own case. Such is the simple fashion in the high court of the prairies—a fashion which might elsewhere be adopted with advantage.

The name of Hissoo-rozo pealed loud upon the air. The crier was calling him into court—another parallel with the customs of civilization.

Three times the name was pronounced, at each repetition in a shriller and louder tone than before.

The man might have spared his voice. He who was summoned was upon the spot, and ready to answer. Before the echo died away, the renegade uttered a loud response, and stepping to an open space within the ring, halted, drew himself up to his full height, folded his arms, and in this attitude stood waiting.

At this crisis, the thought occurred to me, whether I should rush forward, and at once decide the fate of myself and my betrothed. The seated warriors appeared to be all unarmed; and the renegade, whose hand I most regarded, was now further off, having gone round to the opposite side of the fire. The situation was more favorable, and for the moment I stood bending upon the spring. But my eye fell upon the spectators in the back-ground. Many of them were directly in the way I should have to take. I saw that many of them carried weapons, either in their hands or upon their persons, and that Hissoo-rozo himself was still too near.

I could never fight my way against such odds. I could not break such a line. It would be madness to attempt it. Rube's counsel was ringing in my ears; and once more I abandoned the rash design.

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CHAPTER XCVI.

THE RENEGADE CLAIMS HIS CAPTIVES.

THERE was an interval of silence—a dramatic pause—that lasted for more than a minute. It was ended by one of the council rising to his feet, and, by a gesture, inviting Hissoo-rozo to speak.

The renegade began:

"Red warriors of the Hietan! Brothers! What I have to say before the council will not require many words. I claim yonder Mexican girl as my captive, and therefore as my own. Who denies my right? I claim the white horse as mine—my prize, fairly taken."

The speaker paused, as if to wait for further commands from the council.

"Hissoo-rozo has spoken his claim to the Mexican maiden and the white steed. He has not said upon what right he rests it. Let him declare his right in presence of the council!"

This was said by the same Indian who had made the gesture, and who appeared to direct the proceedings. He was not acting by any superior authority which he may have possessed, but merely by reason of his being the oldest of the party. Among the Indians, age gives precedence.

"Brothers!" said Hissoo-rozo, in obedience to the command, "my claim is just. Of that you are to be the judges. I know your true hearts—you will not shut them against justice. I need not read to you your own law, that he who makes a captive has the right to keep it—to do with it as he will. This is the law of your tribe—of my tribe as well; for yours is mine."

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Gusts of approbation caused a momentary interruption in the speech.

"Hietans!" resumed the speaker, "my skin is white, but my heart is the color of your own. You did me the honor to adopt me into your nation. You honored me, by making me first a warrior, and afterwards a war-chief. Have I ever given you cause to regret what you have done? Have I betrayed your trust?"

A volley of exclamations indicated a response in the negative.

"I have confidence, then, in your love of justice and truth. I have no fear that the color of my skin will blind your eyes; for you all know the color of my heart."

Fresh gusts of approbation followed this adroit stroke.

"Then, brothers, listen to my cause! I claim the maiden and the horse. I need not tell where they were found and how. Your own eyes were witness of their capture. There has been talk of a doubt as to who made it; for many horsemen were in the pursuit. I deny that there is any doubt. My lazo was first over the head of the horse—was first tightened around his throat—first brought him to a stand. To take the horse was to take the rider. It was my deed—both are my captives. I claim both as my property. Who is he that disputes my claim? Let him stand forth!"

Having delivered this challenge with a defiant emphasis, the speaker fell back into his former attitude; and once more folding his arms, remained silent and immobile.

Another pause followed, which was again terminated by a sign from the old warrior who had first spoken. His gesture was directed to the crier, who, the moment after, raising his loud, shrill voice, called out:

"*Wakono!*"

The name caused me to start as if struck by an arrow. It was my own appellation. I was Wakono!

It was pronounced thrice—each time louder than the preceding—

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"Wakono! Wakono! Wakono!"

A light flashed upon me. Wakono was the rival claimant. He whose breech-cloth was around my hips, whose robe hung from my shoulders, whose plumed bonnet adorned my head, whose pigments disfigured my face—he of the red hand upon his breast, and the cross upon his brow—was no other than Wakono!

I cannot describe the singular sensation I felt at the discovery. I was in a perilous position, indeed. My fingers trembled among the leaves. I released the branchlets, and let them close up before my face. I dared not trust myself to look forth.

For some moments I stood still and silent, but not without trembling. I could not steady my nerves under such a dread agitation.

I listened, but looked not. There was an interval of breathless silence. No one seemed to stir or speak. They were waiting the effect of the summons.

Once more the voice of the crier was heard, pronouncing in triple repetition—

"Wakono! Wakono! Wakono!"

Again followed an interval of silence; but I could hear low mutterings of surprise and disappointment, as soon as it was perceived that the Indian did not answer to his name.

I alone knew the reason of his demissness. I knew that Wakono could not—the true Wakono; that his counterfeit would not come.

Though I had undertaken to personate the savage chieftain, for this act in the drama I was not prepared. The stage must wait.

Even at that moment I was sensible of the ludicrousness of the situation. So extreme was it, that even at that moment of direst peril I felt a half inclination for laughter! But the feeling was easily checked; and once more parting the branches, I ventured to look forth.

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I saw there was some confusion. Wakono had been reported "missing." The members of the council still preserved both their seats and stoical composure, but the younger warriors behind were uttering harsh ejaculations, and moving about from place to place, with that restless air that betokens at once surprise and disappointment.

At this crisis, an Indian was seen emerging from the tent He was a man of somewhat venerable aspect, though venerable more from age than any positive expression of virtue. His cheeks were furrowed by time, and his hair white as bleached flax—a rare sight among Indians.

There was something about this individual that bespoke him a person of authority. Wakono was the son of a chief—the chief, then, should be an old man. This must be he?

I had no doubt of it, and my conjecture proved to be correct

The white-haired Indian stepped forward to the edge of the ring, and with a waive of his hand commanded silence.

He was instantly obeyed. Murmurings ceased, and all placed themselves in fixed attitudes to listen.

CHAPTER XCVII.

SPEECHES IN COUNCIL.

"HIETANS! began the chief, for such in reality was the old Indian. My children, and brothers in council! I appeal to you to stay judgment in this matter. I am your chief, but claim no consideration for that. Wakono is my son, but for him I ask no favor. I but demand justice and right—such as would be given to the humblest in our tribe. I ask no more for my son Wakono. Wakono is a brave warrior—who among you does not know it? His shield is garnished with many trophies

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taken from the hated pale face—his leggings are fringed with scalps of the Utah and Cheyenne—at his heels drag the long locks of the Pawnee and Arapaho. Who will deny that Wakono—my son Wakono is a brave warrior?

A murmur of assent was the response to the paternal appeal.

"The Spanish Wolf, too, is a warrior—a brave warrior. I deny it not. He is stout of heart and strong of arm. He has taken many scalps from the enemy of the Hietan. I honor him for his achievements; who among us does not?"

A general chorus of grunts and other ejaculations, from both council and spectators, responded to this interrogatory.

The response, both in tone and manner, was strongly in the affirmative; and I could tell by this, that the renegade was the favorite.

The old chief also perceived that such was the prevailing sentiment, and despite his pretensions to fair play, he was evidently a little nettled at the reply. The father of Wakono was undoubtedly no Brutus.

After a momentary pause, he resumed speech, but in a tone entirely altered. He was now painting the reverse side of Hissoo-rozo's portrait, and as he threw in the darker touches, it was with evident pique and hostility.

"I honor the Spanish Wolf," he continued, "I honor him for his strong arm and his stout heart. I have said so; but hear me, Hietans—hear me children and brothers! there are two of every kind—there is a night and a day—a winter and a summer—a green prairie and a desert plain, and like these is the tongue of Hissoo-rozo. It speaks two ways, that differ as light from the darkness—it is double—it forks like the tongue of the rattle serpent—it is not to be believed."

The chief ceased speaking, and the Spanish Wolf was permitted to make reply. He did not attempt to defend himself from the charge of the "double tongue." Perhaps he knew

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that the accusation was just enough, and he had no reason to tremble for his popularity on that score. He must have been a great liar indeed to have excelled, or even equalled the most ordinary story-teller in the Comanche nation, for the mendacity of these Indians would have been a match for Sparta herself.

The renegade did not even deny the assertion. He seemed to be confident in his case. He simply replied.

"If the tongue of Hissoo-rozo is double, let not the council rely upon his word. Let witnesses be called—there are many who are ready to testify to the truth of what Hissoo-rozo has spoken."

"First hear Wakono!—let Wakono be heard!—where is Wakono?"

These demands were made by warriors, members of the council, who spoke almost simultaneously.

"Once more the crier's voice was heard calling "Wakono!"

"Brothers!" again spoke the chief, "it is for this that I would stay your judgment. My son is not here—he went back upon the trail; and has not returned. I know not his purpose. My heart is in doubt, but not in fear. Wakono is a strong warrior, and can take care of himself. He will not be long absent. He must soon return. For this I ask you to delay the judgment."

A murmur of disapprobation followed this avowal. The allies of the Spanish Wolf evidently mustered stronger than the friends of the young chief. The renegade once more addressed the council.

"What trifling would this be, warriors of the Hietan? Two uns have gone down, and this question is not decided! I ask only justice. By our laws the judgment cannot stand over. The captives must belong to some one. I claim them as mine, and I offer witnesses to prove my right. Wakono has no claim, else why is he not here to avow it. He has no proofs but his

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own word—he is ashamed to stand before you without proof—that is why he is now absent from the camp."

This announcement produced a sensation, and I could perceive that the old chief partook equally with the others of the suspicion thus created.

"Who says Wakono is in the camp?" inquired he, in a loud voice.

An Indian stepped forth from the crowd of spectators. I recognized the man whom I had met crossing from the horse guard.

"Wakono is in the camp," repeated he, as he paused outside the circle. "I saw the young chief. I spake with him"

"Where?"

"Only now."

"Where?"

The man pointed to the scene of our accidental rencontre.

"He was going yonder," said he, "he went among the trees—I saw him no more."

This intelligence evidently increased the astonishment of all. They could not comprehend why Wakono should be upon the ground, and yet not come forward to assert his claim. Had he abandoned it altogether?

The father of the claimant appeared as much puzzled as any one. He made no attempt to explain the absence of his son. He could not. He stood silent, and evidently in a state of mystification

Several now suggested that a search be made for the absent warrior. It was proposed to send messengers throughout the camp—to search the grove.

My blood ran cold as I listened to the proposal, my knees trembled beneath me. I knew that if the grove should be searched, I would have no chance of remaining longer concealed. The dress of Wakono was conspicuous—I saw that there was none other like it—no other wore a robe of jaguar skins, and

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this would betray me. Even the paint could not avail, I should be led into the firelight. The counterfeit would be easily detected. I should be butchered upon the spot—perhaps tortured for my treatment of the true Wakono, which would soon become known.

My apprehensions had reached the climax of acuteness, when they were suddenly relieved by some words from the Spanish Wolf.

"Why search for Wakono?" cried he, "Wakono knows his own name? it has been called, and loud enough. Wakono has ears—surely he can hear for himself; if he is in the camp. Call him again, if you will!"

This proposition appeared reasonable. It was adopted, and the crier once more summoned the young chief by name.

The voice, as all perceived, could have been heard to the farthest bounds of the camp, and far beyond.

An interval was allowed, during which there reigned perfect silence, every one bending his ear to listen. There came no answer—no Wakono appeared to the summons,

"Now," triumphantly exclaimed the renegade, "is it not as I said? Warriors! I demand your judgment."

There was no immediate reply. A long pause followed, during which no one spoke—either in the circle, or among the spectators.

At length the oldest of the council rose—relit the calumet, and after taking a whiff from the tube, handed it to the Indian seated on his left. This one in like manner passed it to the next, and he to the next, until the pipe had made the circuit of the fire, and was returned to the old warrior who had first smoked from it. The latter now laid aside the pipe, and in a formal manner, but in a voice inaudible to the spectators, proposed the question. The vote was taken in rotation, and was also delivered *sotto voce*. The judgment only was pronounced aloud.

The decision was singular, and somewhat unexpected. The

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jury had been moved by a strong bearing towards equity, and an amicable adjustment, that might prove acceptable to all parties.

The horse was adjudged to Wakono—the maiden was declared the property of the Spanish Wolf!

CHAPTER XCVIII.

A ROUGH COURTSHIP.

The decision appeared to give satisfaction to all. A grim smile upon his face testified that the renegade himself was pleased. How could he be otherwise? He had certainly the best of the suit, for what was a beautiful horse to a beautiful woman, and such a woman?

Even the white haired chief seemed satisfied—perhaps, of the two the old savage jockey preferred the horse? It might have been different had Wakono been upon the ground. I was much mistaken if he would so tamely have acquiesced in the decision.

Yes, the renegade was satisfied—more than that, he was rejoiced. His bearing bespoke his consciousness of the possession of a rare and much coveted thing. He was unable to conceal the gratification he felt, and with an air of triumph and exultation he approached the spot where the captive sat.

As soon as the sentence was pronounced the Indians, who had been seated, rose to their feet. The council was dismissed. Some of the members strolled off on their own business, others remained by the great fire, mixing among their comrades, no longer with the solemn gravity of councillors, but chatting, laughing, shouting, and gesticulating as glibly and gaily as if they had been so many French dancing masters.

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The trial and its objects appeared to be at once forgotten Neither plaintiff, defendant, nor cause seemed any longer to occupy the thoughts of any one. The horse had been delivered to a friend of Wakono; the maiden to Hissoo-rozo, and the thing was settled and over.

Perhaps, here and there some young brave, with a pain in his heart, may have bent wistful glances upon the lovely captive. No doubt, there were many who looked with envious thoughts upon his Hissoo-rozo and his fortunes.

After the council was over no one interfered—no one seemingly took any interest either in the renegade or his pale-faced squaw. They were left to themselves.

And to me. From that moment my eyes and thoughts rested only on them. I saw no one else. I thought of nothing else. I watched but the "wolf" and his victim.

The old chief had returned into the tent. Isolina had been left alone.

Only a moment alone. Had it been otherwise, I should have sprung forward. My finger had moved mechanically towards my knife; but there was not time. In the next instant Hissoo-rozo stood beside her. He addressed her in Spanish—he did not desire the others to understand what he said. Speaking in this language there would be less danger.

There was one who listened to every word. I listened; not a syllable escaped.

"Now!" began he, in an exulting tone. "Now, Doña Isolina de Vargas! You have heard? I know you understand the tongue in which the council has spoken—your *native* tongue—ha! ha! ha!"

The brute was jeering her.

"You are mine—soul and body mine—you have heard?"

"I have heard," was the reply, in a tone of resignation!

"And surely you are satisfied, are you not? You should be; I am white as yourself; I have saved you from the

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embrace of a red Indian. Surely you are satisfied with the judgment?"

"I am satisfied."

This was uttered in the same tone of resignation. The answer somewhat surprised me.

"'Tis a lie!" responded the brutal monster. "You are playing false with me, sweet señorita. But yesterday you spoke words of scorn—you would scorn me still?"

"I have no power to scorn you. I am your captive."

"Carrambo! you speak truth. You have no power either to scorn or refuse me—ha! ha! ha! And as little do I care if you did. You may like me or not at your pleasure. Perhaps, you will take to me in time, as much as I may wish it; but that will be for *your* consideration, sweet señorita! Meanwhile, you are mine—body and soul you are mine—and I mean to treat you after my own fashion."

The coarse vaunt caused my blood—already hot enough—to boil within my viens. I grasped the haft of my knife, and, like a tiger, stood cowering upon the spring. My intent was first to cut down the ruffian, and then set free the limbs of the captive with the blood-stained blade.

The chances were still against me. A score of savages were yet around the fire. Even should he fall at the first blow, I could not hope to get clear.

But I could bear it no longer, and would have risked the chances at that moment had not my foot been stayed by some words that followed.

"Come!" exclaimed the renegade, speaking to his victim, and making sign for her to follow him. "Come, sweet señorita! This place is too public for man and wife. I would talk with you elsewhere—I know where there are softer spots for that fair form to recline upon—pretty glades, and arbors choice retreats within the shadow of the grove. There, dearest, shall we retire. *Vamos!*"

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Though hideous the signification of the mock poetic speech, I joyed at hearing it. It arrested my hand and limb, both of which were ready for action. It promised a better opportunity. With an effort, therefore, I restrained myself, and resolved to wait. I listened for the reply of Isolina. I watched her as well. I noted her every movement. I saw that she pointed to her limbs—to the thong fastenings around her ankles.

"How can I follow you?" she inquired, in a calm voice, and in a tone of surprise. Surely that tone was feigned? Surely she meditated some design?

"True," said the man, turning back and drawing the knife from his belt. "Carrambo! I had not thought of that, but we shall soon"——

He did not finish the sentence. He stopped in the middle of it, and in an attitude that betokened hesitation. In this attitude he remained awhile, gazing into the eyes of his victim Then, as if suddenly changing his mind, he stuck the knife back into its sheath, and at the same time cried out:

"By the Virgin! I will not trust you. You are too free of limb, sweet *Margariti!* You might try to give me the slip. This is a better plan. Come! raise yourself up! a little higher—so—now we go! Now for the grove—*vamos!*"

While delivering the last words, the ruffian bent himself over the half-prostrate captive, and placing his arm underneath, wound it around her waist. He then raised her upward until her bosom rested upon his—the bosom of my betrothed in juxtaposition with the painted breast of this worse than savage!

I saw it, and slew him not. I saw it, and kept cool. I can scarce tell why, for it is not a characteristic of my nature. My nerves, from being so much played upon during the preceding hours, had acquired the firmness of steel, perhaps, enabled me to endure the sight—this combined with the almost certain prospect of an improved opportunity.

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At all events, I kept cool, and remained in my place, though only for a moment longer.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE CRISIS.

The renegade having raised the unresisting captive in his arms, proceeded to carry her away from the spot. He scarce carried her. Her feet, naked and bound, were trailing upon the grass, both together.

He passed the lodge, and was going toward the copse, in an oblique direction. The savages who saw him only shouted, and laughed.

I waited neither to see or hear more. Still keeping within the timber, I glided along its edge. With quick but noiseless step I went, making for the same point towards which the ruffian ravisher was tending.

I arrived first, and stooping under the shadow of the trees, waited with knife in hand, firm grasped and ready.

His burden had delayed him. He had stopped midway to rest, and was now standing scarce ten paces from the edge of the grove, with his victim still in his arms, and apparently leaning against him.

There was a momentary wavering in my mind as to whether I should not then rush forth, and strike the *coup*. The chance seemed as good as I might have.

I was about deciding in the affirmative, when I saw Hissoo-ozo had again taken up his burden, and was moving towards me. He was making directly for the spot where I stood The crisis was near!

It was even nearer than I thought. The man had scarce

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made three steps from the point of rest, when I saw him stumble and fall to the earth, carrying the captive along with him!

The fall appeared accidental—I might have deemed it so, but for the wild shout with which it was accompanied. Something more than a mere stumble elicited that fearful cry!

There was a short struggle upon the ground—the bodies became separated—one was seen to spring suddenly back. I saw it was Isolina! There was something in her hand—both moonlight and firelight gleamed upon a crimsoned blade; she who grasped it bent for an instant downward—the keen edge severed the thongs from her limbs, and the moment after she was running in full flight across the level sward of the camp-ground.

Without reflection I sprang out of the covert and rushed after. I passed the renegade who had half regained his feet, and appeared but slightly wounded. Astonishment as much as aught else seemed to hold him to the spot. He was shouting and swearing, calling for help, and uttering threats of vengeance.

I could have slain him, and was half inclined to the act; but there was no time to stay. I only thought of overtaking the fugitive, and aiding her in her flight.

The alarm was given—the camp was in commotion—fifty savages were starting upon the chase.

As we ran, my eyes fell upon a horse—a white horse. It was the steed. A man was leading him by a lazo. He was taking him from the fires towards the grounds occupied by the mustangs He was going to picket him upon the grass.

Horse and man were directly in front of us, as we ran—in front of the fugitive. She was making towards them. I divined her intention.

In a few seconds she was up to the horse, and had seized the rope. The Indian struggled and tried to take it away from her; the red blade gleamed in his eyes, and he gave back.

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He still clung to the rope, but in an instant it was cut from his hands, and quick as thought the heroic woman leaped upon the back of the steed, and was seen galloping away.

The Indian was one of the horse-guards, and was therefore armed. He carried bow and quiver. Before the horse had galloped beyond reach, he had bent his bow and sent an arrow from the string. I heard the "wheep" of the shaft, and fancied I heard it strike, but the steed kept on!

I had picked up one of the long spears as I ran across the camp. Before the Indian could adjust another arrow to the string, I had pinned him to the grass.

I drew back the spear, and keeping the white horse in view, ran on.

I was soon in the midst of the mustangs. Many of them had already stampeded, and were galloping to and fro over the ground. The guards were dismayed, and as yet knew not the cause of the alarm. The steed, with his rider, had passed safely through their line.

I was following on foot. Fifty savages were after me, I could hear their shouts, I could hear them cry "Wakono," but I was soon far in the advance of all. The horse-guards as I passed them were shouting, "Wakono!" As soon as I had cleared the horse-drove, I again perceived the steed; but he was now some distance off. To my joy he was going in the right direction—straight for the yuccas upon the hill; my men would see and intercept him.

I ran along the stream with all speed. I reached the broken bank, and without stopping rushed into the gulley, for my horse.

What was my astonishment to find that he was gone! my noble steed gone, and in his place the spotted mustang of the Indian? I looked up and down the channel. I looked along its banks. Moro was not in sight.

I was puzzled, perplexed, furious. I knew no explanation of the mystery, I could think of none. Who could have done it!

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Rube must have done it; but why? In my hot haste I could find no reason for this singular action.

I had no time to reflect—not a moment. I drew the animal from the water, and leaping upon his back, rode out of the channel.

As I regained the level of the plain, I saw mounted men—a crowd of them coming—from the camp. They were the savages in pursuit. One was far ahead of the rest, and before I could turn my horse to flee he was close up to me.

In the moonlight I easily recognized him—it was Hissoo-rozo the renegade.

"Slave!" shouted he, speaking in the Comanche tongue, and with furious emphasis, "it is you who have planned this. Squaw! coward! you shall die. The white captive is mine—mine Wakono! and you"——

He did not finish the sentence. I still carried the Comanche spear. My six months' service in a lance regiment now stood me in good stead—the mustang behaved handsomely, and carried me full tilt upon my foe.

In another instant the renegade and his horse were parted, the former lay levelled upon the grass, transfixed with the long spear, while the latter was galloping riderless over the plain!

At this crisis I perceived the crowd coming up, and close to the spot. There were twenty or more, and I saw that I should soon be surrounded.

A happy idea came opportunely to my relief. All along I perceived that I was mistaken for Wakono. The Indian in the camp had cried "Wakono." The horse-guard shouted "Wakono" as I passed; the pursuers were calling "Wakono" as they rode up; the renegade had fallen with the name upon his lips—the spotted horse, the robe of Jaguar skins, the plumed head-dress, the red hand, the white cross, all proclaimed me Wakono.

I urged my horse forward, and reined up in front of the pur

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suers. I raised my arm, and shook it in menace before their faces. At the same instant I cried out in a loud voice:

"I am Wakono! Death to him who follows!" I spoke in Comanche. I was not so sure of the correctness of my words, either of the orthography or syntax, but I had the gratification to perceive that I was understood. Perhaps my gestures helped the savages to comprehend me—the meaning of them was not to be mistaken.

From whatever cause, the pursuers made no further advance, but one and all, drawing in their horses, halted upon the spot.

I stayed not for further parley, but wheeling quickly around, galloped off as fast as the mustang could carry me.

CHAPTER C.

THE LAST GALLOP.

On facing towards the hill, I perceived the steed still not so distant. His white body gleaming under the clear moonlight, could have been easily distinguished at a far greater distance.

I had expected to see him much further away; but after all, the tilt of the lances, and the menace delivered to the pursuing horsemen, had scarce occupied a score of seconds, and he could not in the time have gone out of sight.

He was still running between myself and the foot of the hill, apparently keeping along the bank of the stream.

I put the Indian horse to his full speed. The point of my knife served for whip and spur. I was no longer encumbered with the spear. It had been left in the body of Hissoo-rozo.

I kept my eyes fixed upon the steed, but he was fast closing

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into the timber that shielded the base of the hill. He was nearing the bend where I had taken the water, and would soon be hidden from my view.

All at once I saw him behind the bushes, swerve and strike to the left across the open plain. To my surprise I saw this, for I had conjectured that his rider was aiming for the cover offered by the thicket.

Without waiting to think of an explanation, I headed the mustang into the diagonal line, and galloped forward.

I was in hopes of getting nearer by the advantage thus given me, but I was ill-satisfied with the creeping pace of the Indian horse—so unlike the long free stretch of my noble Moro. Where was he? Why was I not bestriding him?

The white steed soon shot clear of the hill, and was running upon the plain that stretched beyond it. I saw that I was not gaining upon him; on the contrary, he was every moment widening the distance between us. Where was Moro? Why had he been taken away?

At that instant I perceived a horseman making along the foot of the hill, as if to intercept me. He was dashing furiously through the thicket that skirted the base of the acclivity. I could hear the bushes rattling against the flanks of his horse. He was evidently making all the haste in his power, at the same time aiming to keep concealed from the view of any one upon the plain.

I recognized my horse, and upon his back the thin, lank form of the earless trapper.

We met the moment after at the point where the thicket ended. Without a word passing between us, both simultaneously flung ourselves to the ground, exchanged horses, and remounted. Thank Heaven! Moro was at last between my knees.

"Now, young fellur!" cried the trapper, as I parted from him, "gallip like durnation, an' kitch up wi' her!—we'll soon be arter on yur trail—away then—away!"

I needed no prompting from Rube. His speech was not

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finished before I had sprung my horse forward, and was going like the wind.

It was only then that I could comprehend why the horses had been changed—a *ruse*—it was an afterthought of the cunning trappers! Had I mounted my own conspicuous steed by the camp, the Indians would in all probability have suspected something, and continued the pursuit. It was the spotted mustang that had enabled me to carry out the counterfeit!

I had now beneath me a horse I could depend upon; and with renewed vigor I bent myself to the chase. For the third time the black and white stallions were to make trial of their speed—for the third time was it to be a struggle between these noble creatures. Would the struggle be hard and long? Would Moro again be defeated? Such were my thoughts as I swept onward in the pursuit.

I rode in silence. I scarce drew breath, so keen were my apprehensions about the result. A long start had the prairie-horse; my delay had thrown me far behind him—nearly a mile. But for the friendly light, I should have lost sight of him altogether; but the plain was open, the moon shining brightly, and the snow-white form, like a meteor, beckoned me onward.

I had not galloped far before perceiving that I rapidly gained upon the steed. Surely he was not running at his fleetest? Surely he was going more slowly than was his wont?

Oh, could his rider but know who was coming after! Could she but hear me! I would have called, but the distance was still too great—she could not have heard even my shouts—how could she distinguish my voice?

I galloped on in silence. I was gaining—constantly and rapidly gaining. Surely I was drawing nearer, or were my eyes playing false under the light of the moon?

I fancied that the steed was running heavily—slowly and heavily—as if he was laboring in the race. I fancied—no, it was no fancy—I was sure of it! Beyond a doubt, he was not going at his swiftest speed!

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What could it mean? Was he broken by fatigue?

Still nearer and nearer I came, until scarce three hundred yards appeared between us. I fancied that my shouts might be heard, that my voice——I called aloud—I called the name of my betrothed, coupling it with my own; but no answer came back—no sign of recognition to cheer me.

The ground that now lay between us favored a race-course speed; and I was about putting my horse to his full stretch, when, to my astonishment, I saw the steed stagger forward, and fall headlong to the earth!

It did not check my career, and in a few seconds more I was upon the spot, and halting over horse and rider, still prostrate, I flung myself from the saddle and drew nearer. Isolina had now disengaged herself, and risen to her feet. With her right hand clasping the red knife, she stood confronting me.

"Savage! approach me not!" she cried, in the Comanche tongue, and with a gesture that told me her determination.

"Isolina, I am not—it is"——

"Henri."

No words interrupted that wild embrace. No sound could be heard save that made by our hearts, as they throbbed closely together. * * * * * *

Silently I stood upon the plain, with my betrothed in my arms. Moro was by our side, proudly curving his neck and chafing the steel between his foaming lips. At our feet lay the prairie-horse, with the barb in his heart and the feathered shaft pointing from his side. His eyes were fixed and glassy. Blood still ran from his spread nostrils, but his beautiful limbs were motionless in death!

Dark horsemen were seen approaching the spot. We did not attempt to flee from them. I recognized my followers.

We looked back over the plain. There were no signs of pursuit, but for all that we did not tarry there. We knew not how soon the Indians might be after us. The friends of Hissoo rose

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might start forth upon the trail of Wakono! It was near daybreak when we halted to rest, and then only after the prairie had been fired behind us.

We found shelter in a pretty grove of acacias, and a grassy turf on which to repose. My wearied followers soon fell asleep.

I slept not. I watched over the slumbers of my betrothed. Her beautiful head rested upon my knees—her soft, damask cheek was pillowed upon the robe of jaguar skins, and my eyes rested upon it; the thick tresses had fallen aside, and I saw——

The matador, too, had been merciful, or had gold bribed him from his cruel intent? No matter which, he had failed in the fiendish duty. There, in full entirety, were those delicate organs perfect—complete. I saw but the trifling scar, where the gold-circlet had been rudely plucked—the source of that red hemorrhage that had been seen by Cyprio!

I was too happy to sleep. * * * It was our last night upon the prairies. Before the setting of another sun, we had crossed the Rio Grande, and arrived in the camp of our army. Under the broad, protecting wings of the American eagle, my betrothed could repose in safety until that blissful hour when—— * * *

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CHAPTER CI.

CONCLUSION.

Of the Comanches we never heard more. The story of one only was afterwards told—a fearful tale. Ill-fated Wakono! A horrid end was his.

An oft-told tale by the prairie camp-fire, is that of the skeleton of an Indian warrior, found clasping the trunk of a tree! Wakono had horribly perished.

We had no design of giving him to such a fate. Without thought had we acted, and though he may have deserved death, we had not designed for him such terrible retribution. Perhaps I was the only one who had any remorseful feeling—but the remembrance of that scalp-bedecked shield—the scenes in that Cyprian grove—those weeping captives, wedded to a woeful lot—the remembrance of these cruel realities ever more rose before my mind, stifling the remorse. I should otherwise have felt for the doom of the ill-starred savage.

His death, though terrible in kind, was merited by his deeds, and was, perhaps, as just as punishments usually are.

Dramatic unity demands the death of Ijurra, and by the hand of Hollingsworth. Truth enables me to satisfy the demand.

On my return to the camp, I learned that the act was already consummated—the brother's blood had been avenged!

It was a tragic tale, and would take many chapters in the telling. I may not give them here. Let a few particulars suffice.

From that dread night Hollingsworth had found a willing

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hand to aid him in his purpose of retribution—one who yearned for vengeance, keenly as himself. Wheatley was the man.

The two with a chosen party had thrown themselves on the trail of the guerrilla; and, with Hedro as their guide, had followed it far within the hostile lines. Like sleuth hounds had they followed it night and day until they succeeded in tracking the guerrilleros to their lair.

It was a desperate conflict—hand to hand, and knife to knife; but the rangers at length triumphed. Most of the guerrilleros were slain, and the band nearly annihilated. Ijurra fell by Hollingsworth's own hand; while the death of the red ruffian, El Zorro, by the bowie knife of the Texan Lieutenant was an appropriate punishment for the cruelty inflicted upon Conchita.

The revenge of both was complete—though their sorrow was still borne within their hearts.

The expedition of the two Lieutenants was productive of other fruits. In the lair of the guerrilla they found many prisoners—Yankees and Ayankiedos, and among others that rare diplomatist, Don Raman de Vargas. Of course the old gentleman was relieved from his involuntary service with the Guerrilleros, and arrived at the head-quarters of the American Army, just in time to welcome his fair daughter and future son-in-law from their *ante*-hymeneal "tour upon the prairies."

THE END.

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